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VICE AND ITS VICTIM:

OR,

PHOEBE, THE PEASANT'S DAUGHTER.

A ROMANTIC TALE OF REAL LIFE.

BY THOMAS PECKETT PREST.

Author of "The Miser of Shoreditch," "Schamyl," "Grace Walton," &c., &c.

"When lovely woman stoops to folly,
And find too late that men betray;
What words can soothe her melancholy,
What tears can wash her guilt away."

GOLDSMITH.

LONDON: HENRY LEA, WARWICK LANE, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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Author of "THE SONS OF THE SWORD," "SARACENS," "THE WARRIORS," &c.

"What lovely women do we see to-day!
And how the late that new beauty
What words can tell the beauty of the day,
If that beauty can wash her guilt away."

LONDON:

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CHAPTER I.

THE DREAM—THE VILLAGE HOME AND ITS INMATES.

"Away—away! the brand o' shame and infamy be on thy brow—the bold wanton's deceptive smile be in thy looks and gestures. Approach me not, for there be'st contamination in thy touch and presence;

No. 1.

thou—thou art nae bairn o' mine; noa, noa, noa, she wur good and fair, pure and innocent as the first breath o' infancy, or the sweet simmer flowers, blushing and gleaming 'neath the sun's bright beams; but thou—thou be'st a wretched, fallen creature, vice stamped on ev'ry feature—a lost degraded, abandoned thing, for the finger o' scorn and hatred to point at wi' disgust and loathing! Cling not to me! thou art nae child o' mine!—off—off!

shameless wanton—accursed of heaven and man!”

“Mark, Mark, my poor o’d mon’ thou dost frighten me out o’ my vera senses, wi’ thy wild ravings; and thou’st so pale, an’ do look so strange loike. Mark, I say, don’t ee know where thou be’st? In thine own room, in thine own bed, and wi’ thine own dame. Come, come now, what do all thee, to wake thee up in sic a freeght?”

“See—see! she be there—that wretched emaciated form—that bold impostor, who dares to call herself our pretty bairn, our own sweet, innocent Phoebe! See, see, dame, dost thou not behold her?”

“Oh, dear, Mark, will nothing arouse thee from this? Thou’st been dreamin’, my good o’d mon. But come, the o’d clock down stairs ha’ struck five these ten minutes, and it be broad daylight; so it be time to rise and get to labour.”

“But—but Phoebe—she—”

“She be below, good girl, preparing thy breakfast fore thou goest to thy daily toil, o’d mon. Hark, there be her own sweet pretty voice, that do open every morning wi’ the little song birds in notes o’ love and gladness. God bless her!”

A flute-like, plaintive, girlish voice, merry and mellifluous, and whose every tone came laughing, thrilling, joyous to the heart, was now heard from the room below, singing the following simple words of the well known country song—

“To the fields I carried my milking-pails,

On a May-day morning early;

And there I met with a smart young man,

Who vow’d he loved me dearly!”

The old man drew in his breath as he listened, as though fearful to lose the smallest sound of that sweet, well-loved voice. He raised himself upon his elbow in the bed, with one hand slightly extended in rapt delight, and his eyes fixed intently on the room door, that opened on the short flight of stairs leading to the little parlour. The stern, wild, agitated expression had passed away from his aged features, and a placid smile of parental love and honest pride succeeded; feelings which the mild and gentle countenance of his homely, good old dame showed that she fully participated in.

“Ees, ees,” said old Mark, joyfully, and as if some terrible weight of fear was removed from his breast; “it be our own dear Phoebe’s pretty voice, sure enow. Thank heaven, ’twur only a dream.”

“Aye, to be sure ’twur, Mark; did I not tell thee so? But what did’st thou dream to frighten and agitate thee so?”

“Not noo, not noo, dame,” replied her husband, with a shudder; another time,

mayhap I’ll tell it thee; not noo, not noo. But come, we mun be idling here, wi’ the bright morning’s sun a scorchin’ the vera eyes out o’ one’s head.”

And Mark bounded out of bed as he spoke, hastening to dress himself, and was quickly followed by his wife.

The place where this brief colloquy occurred, was the little sleeping-room in the humble but pretty cottage of honest Mark Mayfield and his motherly dame, who, with their lovely daughter Phoebe—the rustic beauty, or Village Queen, as she was familiarly called—although strangers to aught but toil and poverty, were considered the happiest and most contented beings in bonny Dewsbury—as we shall call the pretty, romantic village in which they resided—one of the most rural and picturesque districts in Yorkshire.

The early morning’s sun, breaking through the green foliage of the old tree, which grew in the little garden before the cottage, and the wall flowers that thickly clustered around the casement, streamed into the chamber. The old woman threw up the window, and the fresh morning breeze impregnated with the fragrance of flowers, came balmy and grateful to the senses.

The clean and neat appearance of the simple articles of furniture which the room contained, was quite refreshing to look upon.

The plain white-washed walls were not suffered to go entirely undecorated. Several extraordinary and eccentric—if we may so call them—little pictures, in pencil and water colours, were suspended from them at intervals. There was an old farm-house, with one of the jolliest and happiest-looking of farmers, carefully and industriously looking after his pigs, and his cows, and his poultry, the former of which were perfect menstrosities of art, and resembled anything but that which they were intended to represent; while the latter would have passed equally as well for ostriches, storks, eagles, or even zebras or camels, as geese, ducks, or fowls.

Some ambitious artist had endeavoured to depicture a moonlight view—rocks, and hills, and a silvery lake, painted in dark Indigo blue; a monster moon in the deepest of yellow, and a solitary traveller gazing pensively and devoutly upon it, in what was intended for the foreground, his head threatening every instant to come into collision with the smiling or rather grinning face of chaste Luna.

Then there was a one-sided old water-mill, with enormous misshapen wings: a cottage, looking very like a large dog-kennel

on an improved plan; and last, though not least, the portrait of a jolly Jack-tar, with a face as red as a fire-bucket, a mouth extending from ear to ear in a legitimate nautical broadgrin, and a tremendous pigtail.

But there was yet another picture, upon which the eyes of poor Mark Mayfield and his wife rested with fond admiration and pride, and which really displayed considerable artistic skill, independent of the interest it excited by the beautiful face it portrayed.

It was the work of a young amateur painter from London—who resided some time at Dewsbury for the benefit of his health—and represented the graceful and sylph-like form of a village girl, arranging flowers in the honeysucked window of her cottage home. A sunny smile sported around her luscious lips, intelligence beamed from her full, bright, blue eyes, and love and innocence, and sweet retiring modesty shone forth in her exquisitely moulded features. The rich, glossy auburn hair, frolicked, curled, and rambled playfully over a neck and shoulders that seemed to be carved out of, and were as spotlessly fair as Parian marble.

It was intended for the portrait of Phoebe Mayfield, the heroine of our tale; but though the resemblance was remarkably striking and interesting, how far—far short did it fall of the lovely original.

The doating parents prized this picture as one of the greatest of their few earthly treasures.

Tic-tac—tic-tac—tic-tac—tic-tac went the old grim-looking clock in the little parlour below, the same as it had ticked (in friendly chat, but wholesome warning of the rapid flight of time,) through whole generations of the family of the Mayfield's, for even more than a century; and it seemed fully prepared to go upon "tic" for the next century to come. The old clock was one of the humble family heir-looms, and right bravely and faithfully it did its duty.

"I be a sluggard this morning," observed Mark, as he walked to the room-door, "an' that be bad—vera bad, when there be work to do. Come dame, we must be jogging. Our bonny bairn, wi' her light heart and merry voice, cares little how the time do go, I reckon. Poor lass, may she ne'er ha'e cause to look back wi' feelings o' pain and regret upon that which be gone an' past."

"Amen!" ejaculated his wife, fervently; and quitting the room they descended the stairs to the parlour, in which Phoebe was so busily engaged in getting ready the morning meal, singing all the while as

merrily and happily as the very spirit of mirth and good humour itself. They stopped a moment at the door to listen to her, and their aged hearts throbbed with emotion and affection towards her. But she suddenly ceased, and they heard her light footstep as she glided across the room on some fresh occupation. They gently opened the door and went in; her back was towards them; the sound of their entrance had not disturbed her, and she did not observe them.

She was tending to some beautiful but simple flowers which she had arranged upon the window-sill, and looked so like the picture we have described in the previous pages, that the poor old people gazed with bated breath and were moved to tears.

"How beautiful are the flowers," said the maiden, taking a heath-rose from its blooming companions, and after scenting its perfume, placing it, with an admiring look in her bosom; "how sweet, how fresh, how lovely are the flowers, fresh from nature's verdant carpet, and weeping with the dew-drops of morn. But, alas," she sighed, pressing one of her white, small delicate hands upon her forehead, "their sweetness must wither ere night closes around. They are beautiful, but their beauty is as short lived as the love evinced by man. Let not this, then, be the type of *his* attachment. Let me gather the delicate evergreen, the sweet flower that blossoms through the year, and I will say as I wreath it in my hair, 'The violets have bloomed and died, the roses have flourished and decayed; but the evergreen is still young, and so is *thy* love. Friend of my heart, you cannot deceive me—I feel that I live but in you—you are my hopes, my thoughts, my existence itself. If I lose *you*, I lose my all—I was but a solitary wild flower in the wilderness of nature until you transplanted me to a more genial soil; and you can never break the fond heart you first taught to glow with passion."

Again the poor girl paused in deep and silent meditation. It was evident that some unusual, racking, doubtful thoughts disturbed the natural serenity of her gentle bosom—a slight, nervous tremor agitated her frame, and sighs, long and heart-drawn frequently escaped her lips. Her parents were surprised and anxious; Mark nudged the arm of his dame, and, with a significant look, in a voice of mingled emotion, he whispered—

"She be thinking o' her lover, poor Henry, dame; what a proud and happy lad he ought to feel himself, blest wi' the love o' sic a fond and faithful heart. He can ne'er deceive thee; good girl—good

girl," he added aloud, unable any longer to control the open expression of his feelings.

The beauteous girl heard him, and, starting, with a faint cry, and a mingled look of love and confusion, she hurried towards them, and was quickly fondled and caressed in her aged parents' arms.

"Why should anxious thoughts and fears disturb thy breast, my own sweet bairn, my gentle Phoebe dear?" said her father, affectionately, and kissing away a tear that trembled like a crystal drop upon her glowing cheek; "thou'rt sad, child—thou'rt sad. Come, come, noo."

"Oh, no," exclaimed Phoebe, with a sudden effort of joy, "I am light—I am merry, happy, father. I should be a cruel, ungrateful thing could I be otherwise, when you and dear old mother are so good, and loving, and—but," she suddenly added, pressing her hand upon her forehead, and her mind seeming to wander into another channel; "should *you* deceive me—desert me. No, no, no, you can never do that. I will wander with you through the wide world, and be thy servant—thy slave, if thou wilt have it so. I will shield thee from the night winds, that they blow not too roughly on thy unprotected head. I will defend thee from the tempest that howls around; and, though the cold world may devote thy name to scorn, though friends may fall off, and associates wither in the grave, there shall be one fond heart which shall love thee better in thy misfortunes, and cherish thee, bless thee still."

"Phoebe—dear Phoebe," said her mother anxiously, and alarmed, "thou—thou art not thyself this morning, child. Some painful dream has disturbed thee in the night, the remembrance of which still agitates and bewilders thy poor brain. Come, come."

"Mother, father," cried Phoebe, again recollecting herself, and endeavouring to smile through her tears, "oh, pardon me, I knew not what I said; 'twas but a temporary wandering of the senses; but 'tis over now. What a weak, silly girl I am. But I am happy—I am cheerful—merry now; and this will be such a joyous day in the village; it is our harvest feast, you know, and there will be a sprightly dance at night in the Hazel Dell, beneath the silvery light of the bonny moon, and you and mother will be there, father, and all the village lads and lasses, and the fine folks will be there. And we shall be so happy, and—"

And thus crying, chatting, and laughing alternately, the beauteous girl conducted her parents to the table. But notwith-

standing all their efforts, the meal passed off dull and languidly, and at its conclusion Mark arose, kissed his dame and Phoebe affectionately, shouldered his pick and shovel, and hastened from the cottage to his daily toil.

CHAPTER II.

THE GATHERING STORM.

A lovely morning was that on which our tale commences. All beauteous nature was in one of her most cheerful moods, and the fields and meadows, hill and dale, the trees and flowers, valley and woodland, lake and streamlet all things seemed to smile and glisten in the bright flood of golden sunlight which streamed forth from the clear blue sky.

How light, how fresh, how balmy was the pure air, wafted o'er the lofty hills, breathing the perfume of myriads of flowers and teeming corn-fields. And from every leafy spray the birds carolled their sweetest notes, as if in joyous welcome of the happy season.

And on this fair morn of cheerfulness and sunlight, Phoebe Mayfield—shortly after the departure of her father—stepped forth from her cottage home into the green fields that stretched before it, and bounded it on every side. How lovely looked the rustic village queen as she tripped lightly on her way, amidst sweets and flowers—herself the sweetest blossom of them all—and all things beautiful. Health was on her cheek, love beamed in chastened radiance from her bright blue eyes, and a thousand graces were developed in her fairy-like form. The grass seemed scarcely to bend beneath the gentle pressure of her tiny feet, and the simple wild flowers that bloomed luxuriantly at every step, appeared to look up and smile at her, as if proud and delighted at the presence of one, like themselves, so fair and innocent.

The day was set apart for a general holiday in the village of Dewsbury, and for miles around, for the humble rustics were about to celebrate the harvest home; and mirth and revelry, sports and pastimes, games, and gambols, everywhere, and for everybody. The hours were to be absorbed in one continuous round of pleasure and innocent enjoyment, and at night there was to be a merry dance, 'neath the harvest moon, in a beautiful romantic spot, a favourite place of resort for young and old, on summer evenings, after the labours of the day were o'er, called the Hazel Dell.

And a numerous happy party was expected there, which, of course, would not be considered complete without the presence of Phoebe, and her lover and companion from the earliest days of childhood Henry Ashford, a handsome, manly-hearted young rustic, of strong passions, but generous feelings, who resided a short distance from the village, with his only sister Amy, several years his senior, lovely alike in person and in mind, but who had quaffed deep and bitterly from sorrow's poisoned bowl.

And poor old Mark Mayfield—whose constant lot was toil “from early dawn to closing eve,”—on this particular occasion had promised the dame to leave work an hour or two earlier than usual, and, if he was not too tired, to take her to the Hazel Dell, to join their daughter and Henry, and all the rest of the smiling faces and merry hearts that were there expected to congregate.

Before we proceed further it may be perhaps as well to state that the period of which we are writing was the commencement of August, 1812.

The bells were ringing merrily, shouts of mirth and gladness broke at intervals upon the tranquil air from different happy rustic parties, who, attired in their holiday gear were hastening on their way to the scene of festivity. But strange, Phoebe appeared carefully to avoid them—though the very soul of pleasure and innocent gaiety shone forth in every expression of her beauteous face—and having traversed a broad meadow, some short distance from the cottage, she stepped across the winding road and entered upon a long narrow lane, o'ershadowed by tall trees, which led to a secluded spot, some distance to the right of the village. And here we will leave her for the present, and request the reader to accompany us to a different scene.

There was quite an aristocratic party of military gentlemen seated outside “The Plough,”—a pleasant old-fashioned country inn—doing ample justice to the worthy landlord's excellent wine, laughing, chatting and joking merrily merrily, and occasionally adding to the hilarity of the hour—early as it was—by amatory or bacchanalian song and chorus, to give due effect to which each and all exerted themselves with stentorian power, if not with any great musical ability.

And old Roger Swillet the host of this unusually quiet hostelry, and his man and factotum, the eccentric but kind hearted Giles, and the fellow-servant and sweet heart of the latter, the pretty, buxom, simple, merry-hearted Patty Pert, were as

busy as bees, and in excellent spirits on the important occasion.

The party consisted of Lord Edward Selborne, a handsome, high-spirited, but rather wild and thoughtless young nobleman; Captain Beaufort, his intimate friend, a reckless, unprincipled libertine and debauché, and several other officers of hussars, their regiment having been quartered near the village of Dewsbury for some weeks past.

At the time we introduce these gallant gentlemen to the reader, Captain Beaufort was singing the following song, in a fine manly, rollicking and musical voice, his companions—with the exception of Lord Selborne, who stood against the trunk of a tall poplar tree, which grew by the doorway of the old inn, a little apart from the rest, and seemed in rather a thoughtful mood—joining heartily in the chorus:

Love and war, love and war,
Are each the soldier's guiding star;
When he quits the tented field,
To woman's magic power he'll yield.
Love and war, &c.

The hero fears no foreign foe,
But bows to Cupid's power low;
Then be this toast re-echoed far,
Our monarch, country, love and war!
Be this toast, &c.

Loud and enthusiastic applause followed this vocal display, in which Roger, Giles, and Patty, who had stood admiringly by at a respectful distance, joined lustily.

“Gentlemen,” said Captain Beaufort, rising, “charge your glasses; we must do full honour to the toast I am about to propose, for it is a soldier's, and is devoted to love and loyalty. Brother officers, gallant companions in arms, upstanding, uncovered (the gentlemen rose simultaneously), we'll drink a bumper to the health of our gracious sovereign and the royal family, the bright smiles of beauty, and love and war! Hip, hip, hip, huzza!”

Every glass was raised to the lips in an instant, and right loyally was the toast responded to. The officers then retired inside the inn, leaving Captain Beaufort and Lord Selborne to themselves.

“You are sad, colonel,” said the captain, approaching his lordship jocosely; “now I am no soldier if I cannot guess the cause. Lower me to the ranks, and drum me out of the regiment if you are not in love.”

“You have a keen penetration, captain,” replied Selborne, affecting a laugh, “'tis true the little blind god has laid siege to my heart, and I am fain to surrender at discretion.

"And the fair being who has excited this intense passion in your breast, my lord, is the pretty hedger's daughter, Phoebe Mayfield, or, as she is admiringly called, the Village Queen. Your lordship is not very ambitious, though I confess that your rustic innamorata hath charms sufficient to captivate the most cold and insensible."

"Charms!" exclaimed Lord Selborne, passionately, "by the gods, Beaufort, she is as bright and lovely as the rosy blush of morn. She is the beauteous representative of all the graces, so gentle, so playful, so artless, and so innocent."

Beaufort again laughed at the warmth with which his lordship spoke of the fair being who had so completely captivated him, as he replied—

"You are enthusiastic, colonel. Phoebe is really a most irresistible, delectable, delightful little creature; and, egad, she would take the town by storm, and would be an admirable and exquisite companion in gig or tandem, on the Row or in the Mall, though I doubt much whether she could be warranted to go well in harness."

At this part of the conversation, the busy and rather inquisitive Giles and Patty made their appearance at the door of the inn, and observing the captain and his lordship busily engaged, drew aside to listen.

"Indeed," returned Selborne, in answer to his gay and thoughtless companion's observations, "but the fire of her laughing, sparkling, wicked little eyes much deceive me, captain, if she can long resist the snare I have laid to entrap her. She is giddy and thoughtless; young, unsuspicious, and inexperienced, with sufficient vanity to court the smiles of flattery, and to be dazzled and allured by the delusive pleasures of the metropolis. The advances I have hitherto made towards her have been favourably received. She has secretly accepted my letters and my presents; already she begins to look coldly on her rustic lover, Henry Ashford, and, if fortune does not prove a jilt to me, a few hours only shall complete my conquest. I have obtained leave of absence from the regiment, and, deceived by a promise of marriage, the charming Phoebe Mayfield shall, on the wings of love, be hurrying with me to the gay metropolis, and far away from her native village home, where she now reigns the simple queen of beauty."

"La, Giles," said the simple Patty, in a burst of admiration, "ain't that pretty?"

"Ah, there are listeners!" said Selborne, turning hastily round and observing Giles and his sweetheart, who looked confused and stupified. "What now, boy?" he addressed aloud, and angrily.

"Boy!" repeated Giles, indignantly, "come, I like that. Patty, why doant ee speak up for I? I ax your lordship's pardon, my lord, but I be Master Swillet's *man*, and pot-boy Stubbles—Giles Stubbles, that be my name, an' they do reckon I the cutest *lad* in all the North Ridin'."

"Ees, ees, zur, my lord," said Patty, curtsying; "an' please ye, I be Patty—Patty Pert, Giles's fellow servant, and Mrs. Giles Stubbles that is to be, when we have saved money enow to be married, an' please ye, zur, my lord."

"And upon my word," said the gay young captain, smiling, "a very pretty piece of homely furniture you are for an honest man's house. I declare I must steal a kiss from those ruby, tempting little lips."

And the libertine threw his arms around the waist of the blushing Patty, and faithfully fulfilled his promise, much to the astonishment and jealousy of the gaping Giles, who said—

"Come, come, I say, Measter Captain, that be a takin' a great liberty, I do reckon."

"Lor bless ee, no it bean't Giles," said Patty, "it be no liberty at all. Thank'ee, zur, thank'ee," she added, laughing, and curtsying to the captain.

"But I say, Master Giles," observed Lord Selborne, "you and your fair companion were listening to mine and Captain Beaufort's conversation. What did you hear?"

"What, I—I, my lord," faltered out Giles; "why I heard nothing; that is I—"

"No equivocation," said his lordship, sternly.

"I—I—I ax your lordship's pardon," replied Giles, "it wur vara wrong o' me to listen, I know; well then, I did hear ye zay zummut 'bout taking o' the pretty Phoebe Mayfield to Lunnun, an' a makin' a fine lady on her."

"Ees," added Patty, "dressed up in silks an' satins, wi' diamond golden rings on every finger, and great big golden thingy-mybobs a hanging from her ears."

"An' a tall footman to walk behind her, an' carry her lap-dog, wi' a long gold-headed cane, in a cauliflower wig, sky-blue gold-laced coat, an' crimson waistcoat, an' yellow plush breeches, and great big calves as large as bolsters. He, he, he!" laughed Giles.

"Confusion!" whispered Selborne, aside to his companion, "they have overheard too much; they must be silenced. Giles," he observed, aloud, "you are a fine lad—a sharp lad; now, if I were to give you a guinea, what would you say?"

"Why," answered Giles, promptly, "that

you were one o' the best fellows—that be, gentlemen, that I ha' zeed for many a day."

"And suppose I were to give your pretty sweetheart here one also?" said Beaufort.

"Odds, dickens and dadies, zur," cried the delighted Patty, "you doant mean it now, do ye? What, a real golden guinea for I, an' another for Giles? Why, that be a matter of how much money, eh?"

"'Tis here, Giles?" said Lord Selborne, handing him the guinea.

"And here is another to match your lovers, Patty," observed the captain, giving Patty the money.

"Why, it be though," said Giles, looking joyfully at the coin, "it be a real, downright, arnest golden guinea! Oh, thank ee, my lord, thank ee. I shall never be able to spend all this mint o' money."

"You will not mention a word that you have heard me say to-day about Phoebe Mayfield, eh?" said his lordship.

"Not a word, my lord," answered Giles.

"Not a single syllabub, your lordship," added Patty, curtsying.

"Enough, keep this promise faithfully, and I will further reward you. Remember, mum's the word—you understand? Now, captain."

With these words Lord Selborne and Beaufort quitted the inn.

"Oh, Giles," said the delighted Patty, turning the money over with great satisfaction in her hand, "ain't we rich now?"

"Ees, Patty," replied her lover; "but I tell ee what it be, I doant half like this fine lord, wi' his gold-laced coat, an' smooth tongue; an' what he said about Phoebe; for she be a silly, easy, good-natured lass, an' might be led astray. Poor Henry, she do quite slight him ever since these soger chaps ha' been quartered near the village, an' if his nose ben't but out o' joint my name ben't Giles Stubbles."

At the moment the sound of numerous merry voices singing was wafted on the still morning air from a distance.

"It be the lads an' the lasses on their way to the Hazel Dell, where there is to be a merry-making, and a dance to celebrate the harvest home," remarked Giles, "an' won't we be there, too, eh, Patty?"

"Giles, Giles, I say!" now called his master from the house.

"That be measter," said Giles, "an' I know, by the sound o' his voice, that he be getting into a passion. So we must in and attend to the customers, Patty. Come."

They quickly entered the house.

It should have been mentioned that the old inn stood upon the banks of a river, at which point it was crossed by a rustic bridge to get to the village. The sounds

of mirth grew nearer and more distinct, and presently a number of male and female villagers, attired in their best, tripped gaily across the bridge, singing the following chorus—

"Harvest home—our harvest home!
The merry time of harvest home!
When nature fair more lovely seems,
And all around with plenty teems.

Abundance smiles upon the poor,
And lavishes its golden store;
Then join our revels—hither come,
And celebrate our harvest home!"

"So, my lads and lasses," said old Roger Swillet, coming from the house, and greeting the merry party, "you are going to join the sports in the Hazel Dell, to do honour to our harvest home; and I do wish that you may all enjoy yourselves to your heart's content."

"Thank ye, Master Swillet," replied one of the rustics; "but come, my friends, we must not delay."

Thus saying, the villagers went merrily on their way to the scene of festivity, again singing their simple chorus, and Roger having watched them for some time retired into the house.

They had scarcely departed, when old Mark Mayfield, going to his work, with pick and shovel on shoulder, and followed by Henry, whom he had met on his way, crossed the bridge, and looked for a minute or two after the villagers. Henry, who seemed greatly depressed in spirits, crossed over to the old tree which grew near the inn, and leaning against it, became lost in thought.

"They be merry—very merry," said Mark, alluding to the villagers, "an' it do glad my heart to hear them, though I mun be a sharer in their pleasures. Noa, no, there ben't near a holiday for poor old Mark Mayfield. All toil, toil—work, work for he. Noa matter—noa matter, he ha' gotten health and strength, a good, faithful old dame, an' one o' the prettiest an' most affectionate o' bairns in the country, an' he be content—he be content. Harry, lad," he said, crossing over to him, and clapping him on the shoulder, "what's thee moping here for, as though thee'd gotten a world o' trouble on thy mind? What ails thee?"

"Nothing—nothing, Mark," replied the young man, confused and agitated. "I'm—that is—oh, I be sad, very sad at heart."

"Tut, tut, mon," returned Mark, "what should make thee sad? Thou art young and strong; an' having a good edication, thou'lt be able to work thy way to fortune by-an'-by, mayhap. Besides, thou'rt a

good, kind sister; my Phoebe loves thee, and—"

"No, no," interrupted Henry, hastily, and with great emotion; "I thought she did, but 'twas all a dream—a bitter mockery. Phoebe Mayfield hates, despises me now, and I am wretched."

"Why, Harry, Harry, thee'st surely daft mon," exclaimed Mark, with a look of surprise; "my Phoebe turned jilt! Noa, noa, I will not believe it, for though she be young and giddy, she be good and true, an' faithful, an' she would sooner die, I know, than sport or trifle with thy feelings, Harry."

"Aye," sighed the young man, "so I did believe once, and I was happy, oh, who was more proud and happy than was the humble Harry Ashford in the love of his pretty and innocent Phoebe. She was the companion of my childhood; together we rambled o'er the flower-deck'd meads, and through woodland glades, or climbed the lofty, verdant hills in sportive play. We mingled our joyous laugh together; our hopes, our wishes, our pleasures were mutual. I saw no light but in her sunny smiles—I knew no happiness when absent from her presence. But now all is changed—she is changed, and I—"

"Speak out, mon," said Mark, fiercely, greatly excited, and grasping the arm of Harry, "speak out, I do insist, I—I command thee! There be a mystery in thy words I cannot fathom. Changed! My Phoebe, the village pride—the idol o' doating parents—she changed? What meanest thou, Harry? Tell me, I—I charge thee tell me."

"Yes," gasped Henry, in a half-stifled voice, and his manly bosom swelling and heaving with the power of his emotions, "I will speak out, for it do press upon my burning and distracted brain like some monstrous burthen. Ever since the soldiers have been quartered near the village, and Phoebe has been dazzled by the showy appearance, and flattering tongue of that fashionable lord from London, she meets me with freezing coldness, shuns my society, and—"

"No more—no more," cried Mark, in impatient and frenzied accents; "thou'lt drive me mad. If I believed this wild and reckless nobleman had dared to raise his guilty thoughts towards my innocent child not even his rank or title should shield him from my vengeance. Thou knowest how fondly I and her poor mother do love her, Harry, and that she be the prop, the mainstay of our declining years, but we would sooner see her dead—aye, dead an' cold at our feet, than fallen an' degraded—a mark

for the finger o' shame an' scorn to point at!"

"Alas—alas," sighed Henry.

"But, noa, noa, it cannot be; thou'st suffered thy jealous feelings to mislead thee, Harry, an' I be an' old fool to excite myself thus. Phoebe Mayfield be too pure an' good ever to harbour a thought which she should blush to acknowledge, or cause one pang to the bosoms o' her aged parents. Come, come, mon arouse thyself, an' meet her wi' thy usual smiles to-night at the dance in the Dell. But I must be jogging, so good-bye, Harry, good-bye. Keep up thy spirits, lad, an' fear not; faint heart ne'er won fair lady, thou knowest. Good-bye."

With these words, Mark shook Henry heartily by the hand, and then hurried on his way.

CHAPTER III.

THE TEMPTER AND HIS VICTIM.

"Poor old man," said Henry, feelingly, when he was gone, "oh, may thy fond hopes ne'er be doomed to be disappointed; but I shudder at the dismal forebodings that cross my mind, and distract my brain. Oh, Phoebe, did'st thou but know the bitter anguish thou hast caused me, methinks—"

The merry tones of a beautiful and melodious voice, singing a simple country ballad, interrupted him in his soliloquy, and arrested his whole attention; and looking eagerly in the direction from whence the sweet sounds proceeded, he ejaculated—

"Ah, 'tis her voice! and see, she is coming this way, looking prettier than ever I do think. And—eh?—yes—no—can my eyes deceive me? No, no, it is too true; Lord Selborne joins her; his demeanour is bold and familiar, and yet she repels not his advances. [My heart will burst!—I shall go mad!"]

He clasped his forehead in an agony of anguish and despair, and retired behind the old tree to watch what passed between Lord Selborne and Phoebe.

Lord Selborne quickly made his appearance, conducting Phoebe. He had encircled her slender waist with one arm, and was gazing into her blushing, but smiling face with an intensity of expression which showed the powerful and dangerous passions that held predominance in his breast.

The brain of Henry Ashford was fearfully excited; feelings of shame, regret and indignation agitated his bosom; he clenched his fists; he trembled; his heart throbbed

at double its wonted pace, and it was with difficulty he could control his feelings sufficiently to avoid revealing himself.

"You are a little fairy, beauteous Phoebe," said the wily libertine, drawing the light graceful form of the pretty village girl closer to him, and smiling admiringly in her half-averted face, "you are a little fairy, I say, formed in nature's most perfect mould, one whose bewitching smiles might kindle love's most ardent passion even within a stoic's breast. Such matchless charms would add lustre to a palace, and even a monarch might feel proud to own you for the partner of his throne."

Poor Phoebe felt confused at this fulsome speech, and for a minute or two she knew not how to answer; but at length, in a faltering and tremulous voice, she cried—

"Oh, sir, that is, my lord, you make use of such fine words that I don't understand you; though I feel that I should not listen to you. I am but a poor, simple country girl, born to poverty, and with no pretensions to any but the peasant's humble lot; happy in the love of my good old parents, and—and Henry Ashford. Besides, I have heard that you great noblemen from London are all deceivers, who—"

"Deceive you, dearest Phoebe," interrupted Lord Selborne, vehemently; "perish the guilty thought. He must indeed be a villain of the deepest dye who would seek to betray such innocence as yours. The love I have acknowledged for you is as sincere as it is fervent. I would snatch you from your humble station, bear you in triumph to London, and place my heart, my title, rank, and fortune all at your feet."

"Dear, dear, how my poor heart flutters," said Phoebe, aside. "Can he be sincere? Oh, how I should like to go to London, and to become a fine lady, too, dressed in silks and satins, and glittering with jewels. But," suddenly recollecting herself, she added aloud, "my lord, your words agitate me, and bewilder my brain. No, no, the fatal mist which was fast gathering before my eyes again disperses, and the warm tide of nature's truest, purest feelings gushes to my heart. Away, away, tempt me not. Think you, I can forsake my childhood's home of happiness and content? Or with base ingratitude, abandon those aged parents so kind and indulgent, and who have none but me to cheer them in their poverty, and smooth their rough pathway to the grave? Think you, I could thus cruelly lay desolate their little world of joy, and leave them childless, heart broken, and alone? Oh, how terrible, how revolting is the thought. Cease, then, my lord, for love, duty, and virtue triumph still. Phoebe

Mayfield can reject wealth, rank, title, everything; but may heaven's curses pursue her if ever she leaves to misery and despair, the aged and helpless authors of her being!"

"Confusion! how shall I combat this difficulty?" muttered Selborne to himself, "nay," he shortly observed, aloud, "you excite yourself too warmly, and, misunderstanding me, do injustice to my motives. Your separation from your parents would be but brief; I would make you my wife, my lawful wife, and then, as Lady Selborne, restore you to them, and make them partakers of our wealth and happiness."

"What?" exclaimed the poor, simple fond-hearted girl, joyfully, "make my poor old parents great gentlefolks, with servants to wait upon them, and to be called Squire and Lady Mayfield; and to ride to church on Sundays in their own carriage? Oh, that would be delightful. But then, poor Henry, what would become of him? For he loves me truly and would certainly break his heart if—"

"Oh, I would make a handsome provision for your rustic lover, dear Phoebe," replied his lordship, "and no doubt that would quickly reconcile him to your loss."

"Villain—heartless, designing villain!" exclaimed young Ashford, rushing hastily forward, unable any longer to control his disgust and indignation. He unceremoniously forced Lord Selborne from Phoebe, and was about to follow up the same by a blow, when our heroine resolutely interposed between them, and in a voice whose every tone thrilled to the heart of the distracted Henry, she cried—

"Hold, Henry Ashford, I command you. There was a time when I thought you not unworthy of my love; but—but, mark me, that time has gone by, and since you have so far descended as to become the evesdropper, you merit alone my pity and contempt. Nay, young man, you may e'en frown and bite your lips; I little heed your rage; but, dare to raise your hand in anger against his lordship, and from that moment Phoebe Mayfield will look upon you with disgust, and for the future consider you her mortal enemy."

"It is done," groaned Henry, with agony, "she has said the fatal word. Despair—despair. Oh, wretched—wretched Henry."

With a bursting heart he turned away from the proud gaze of Phoebe, and sobbed hysterically.

At that moment a gentle hand warmly pressed his own, and a tender sympathising voice ejaculated—

"Henry—Henry—dear brother."

It was Amy Ashford, the kind and loving, and still pressing her brother's hand, she

endeavoured to urge him from the spot, while fixing a mingled look of pity and reproach upon Phoebe, she said—

“Misguided girl, oh, may you not have bitter cause to repent the fatal transactions of this day. Come, come, Henry, brother, this is no place for you.”

And forcing him away, they hastily entered the little lane which led to the cottage in which they resided.

“What have I done?” gasped forth Phoebe, and starting as if aroused from some painful dream; “what have I said? Poor Henry, how shamefully have I wronged you. Unhand me, my lord, I must follow him and explain.”

“Forbear, Phoebe,” said his lordship, detaining her, “Henry Ashford has proved himself unworthy of you; would you degrade yourself by truckling to his strong passions and wild caprices?”

Phoebe returned no answer, but sighed deeply, pressing her hand upon her forehead, and the crafty Selborne having whispered into her ear some words of consolation, which she, alas, was too ready to listen to, led her from the spot.

CHAPTER IV.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

The cottage in which Henry Ashford and his amiable sister Amy resided, was situated in a pleasant but secluded part of the outskirts of the village of Dewsbury. The exterior was plain and homely, and the humble rooms it contained were remarkable for nothing but their extreme neatness and simplicity, for which they were indebted to the care and attention of Amy, whose chief study was to render the home of a brother to whom she was so fondly attached, as comfortable as possible.

Amy Ashford was indeed a beautiful woman in the largest sense of the word; prepossessing in person, amiable, engaging, gentle in manners and disposition. She had been disappointed in her first love; death had blighted all her brightest hopes and prospects, and having lost their parents when they were both young, Amy had continued ever since to reside with, and attend to the domestic concerns of her brother, of whom she was the senior by nearly five years.

Sad and wretched were the brother and sister, as they sat in the little parlour of the cottage on the afternoon of the day on which the events we have been recording took place. Henry was sitting mournfully

by the open casement, his elbow on the table, and his head resting on his hand; his fine, manly countenance was the very picture of grief and despair; from which Amy, in her gentlest accents, tried, but, in vain, ever and anon, to arouse him, and to impart consolation to his deeply afflicted bosom.

“Alas,” she sighed, “that this fearful event should ever have occurred, and thus to add one more bitter drop to my cup of misery. Come, come, dear brother, do not take on so; arouse yourself from this lethargy of grief and despair, and—”

“Why, why do you awaken me from the sweet dream of former days of happiness which wrapped my senses?” demanded the young man passionately. Methought I saw her once more the gentle, fond, and innocent girl who won my boyish love, and raised my thoughts to halcyon bliss, and dazzling hopes of future happiness. But the stern, the terrible reality is now before me. Phoebe is false, heartless, wanton, and—”

“Hold, hold, Harry,” interrupted his sister, hastily; “surely you know not what you say. Phoebe Mayfield never, never can deserve such cruel epithets as those you have unjustly applied to her.”

“She does—she will—and more,” exclaimed her brother, vehemently; “already hath she imbibed the honeyed poison from the lips of the base, designing villain, Lord Selborne, and, blinded by pride and vanity, she will be hurried headlong to destruction. Even now the fearful future is visibly presented to my imagination. I see the drooping flower blighted, withered, crushed by the despoiler’s accursed insidious arts; that which was once so lovely, changed to a thing of scorn, of shame, and loathing. She’s lost! and black and hideous despair alone are mine.”

“Yield not thus to the fierce tempest of your passions,” remonstrated Amy, “but listen to a sister’s sympathising and affectionate voice; be calm, be calm.”

“Calm, calm!” he repeated bitterly, “you mock me; you, even you have closed your heart against me, and would insult mine ears by cold advice, and wanton trifling with my feelings. But I wonder not; you never knew what it was to love, and therefore have no sympathy with me. Leave me; I thought I had a sister, kind, gentle, loving, but it was a delusion; a wild phantasy of the disordered brain. Begone, I am a wretch, despised, uncared for now.”

“Henry—Henry,” returned the poor girl, in a voice of powerful emotion, and with a look of the deepest sorrow and reproach, “is it from your lips I hear those cruel

words, that open afresh the wounds of a seared and broken heart, which turned alone to you for sympathy and consolation? No, no, it cannot be. Is it not enough that I have had to endure years of torturing misery and wept scalding tears of agony and regret, to the memory of him who won my woman's fondest, purest love, and in whose silent grave my disappointed hopes are for ever entombed? 'Tis cruel—most cruel. Oh, Henry, I little thought you did value a sister's feelings so lightly."

The violence of her anguish choked her further utterance, and she wept bitterly.

Henry's first burst of passion was over, he recollected himself, and keenly upbraiding himself for the words he had so thoughtlessly suffered to escape his lips, he approached his sister, and gently taking her hand, in a voice of the tenderest emotion, said—

"Amy! She weeps—and I have done this. I—I'm bewildered—I'm mad! Oh, wretch—wretch; ungrateful villain; what have I said to wound a sister's feelings thus? Sister! Oh, what fond emotions does that dear, that cherished name awaken. Amy, from the earliest days of childhood, you have been sister, friend, protector, benefactor, all to me; and I must be a heartless scoundrel could I e'er forget the boundless debt of gratitude I owe you, or wilfully add one pang of anguish to your already deeply lacerated breast. The hand of affliction came heavily upon me;—whose heavenly voice then soothed my cares to rest—whose friendly hand led me again to peace and hope?—my sister's. I was reduced to poverty and want, brought on by youthful folly and intemperance. All shunned, despised, deserted me, save one fair commiserating, and indulgent being, who watched me even with a mother's anxious care—never reproached me for the past, but, from her own scanty pittance, relieved my necessities and restored me to prosperity. That one mild, affectionate being was thee, my sister. In sickness and in sorrow, in misery and want, in storm and sunshine, through weal or woe, you, my dear sister, Amy, were ever by my side, like some good angel ministering to my wants, and by your bright smiles cheering me on to hope and happiness. Pardon me, Amy, oh, pardon my rash tongue. Accused for ever be the unmanly wretch, who with base ingratitude could e'er return a sister's generous love!"

"Henry—dear Henry," exclaimed Amy, throwing herself with convulsive emotion on his bosom, "you are not changed; thank heaven, your noble, manly heart is not changed, you are still my own fond brother."

It was some minutes ere the brother and

sister could again give utterance to their feelings in words; but at length the sound of distant music, followed by loud shouts aroused them, and hurrying to the window, they looked anxiously in the direction from whence they proceeded.

"It is the villagers at their joyous revels. You will join them, will you not?" said Amy.

"No—no," replied Henry, in agitated tones, "I cannot; my mind is not now attuned to feelings of mirth. Ah, look!" he hastily added, grasping his sister's wrist with sudden emotion, and pointing from the window. "Look—look! they are there! Do you not see them yonder, in the red glare of the setting sun? See, with what presumptuous freedom the daring libertine's arm encircles her fair form, and she, the false one, seems happy in his contaminating endearments. Oh, maddening sight! Let me begone, and heap my curses on her guilty head!"

"For mercy's sake, what would you do?" cried Amy, endeavouring to detain him. "Henry—dear brother—oh, forbear!"

He was, however, deaf to her entreaties. "Detain me not," he exclaimed, fiercely, "hungry vultures seem gnawing at my heart—my brain's on fire—oh, agony!"

Thus saying, the wretched young man tore himself away, and rushed wildly from the cottage.

"He's gone," sighed Amy, still looking from the window, and watching his retreating footsteps with the utmost fear and anxiety. "And see, with the wild speed of a maniac, he rushes across the meadow towards them. Now they disappear among the clustering trees. All merciful providence, protect my poor brother."

She clasped her hands, and raised her eyes towards heaven in fervent supplication, then slowly retired from the room.

CHAPTER V.

THE HOUR OF TRIAL—THE STRUGGLES OF THE HEART.

The sun was now sinking in retiring glory behind the western hills, tingeing the earth with a golden hue, and floating in clouds of variegated grandeur, which the most skilful painter's art might in vain attempt to imitate. The sultry, oppressive heat of the day was gone, and a refreshing breeze was wafted from the hills and streamlets, which came with a welcome sweetness to the senses of the weary traveller.

Dame Mayfield had been busy preparing

the evening repast, and she now came forth from the cottage, and anxiously watched to catch a glimpse of her husband on his way home. Good humour was expressed in every lineament of her venerable features, and the smile which played in her still keen and intelligent eyes, bespoke content and happiness.

"There," she observed, "I have completed my usual task, and now I don't care how soon my poor old mon do return from his daily labour; he promised me, if he were not too tired to gi'e me a treat, by taking me to see the dance in the Hazel Dell this evening; and, egad, if he do but keep his word, I shall begin to think myself quite young and sprightly again."

And the poor old woman elevated her neat, prim figure to its full height, and at that time seemed to be by no means on unfriendly terms with herself.

She walked to some short distance from the cottage, and looked eagerly along the road.

"My sight be not so good as it wur some thirty years ago," she remarked, "and if it wur I couldn't see anything of Mark. The sun be fast retiring in the western sky, and it be high time that my old mon rested from his toil. Our Phoebe, too, has been absent from home since the morning, which is very unusual. But no doubt she be with her lover, young Ashford, enjoying the sports; heaven bless her! for she be a good girl, and I'm sure it would break her poor old parents' hearts should any harm befall her."

The voice of old Mark was now heard singing cheerfully, as he wended his way home. It was a very old Yorkshire song, which from time immemorial has been popular among the humble ranks of society, and which, no doubt, is still a favourite. Mark was singing the first verse of this country ditty, which ran as follows, with much glee,

"Young Roger the miller, he courted of late,
A farmer's fair daughter, called beautiful Kate,
And she to her portion had jewels and rings,
And she to her portion had many fine things;
And she to her portion had fine silken gowns,
And she to her portion had five hundred pounds."

"Ah," exclaimed the dame, joyfully, "that be Mark's merry voice, trolling his old country ditty as he returns from his labour, with a heart ever light and cheerful, as his pockets be empty and his means be scanty."

Mark now appeared in the road leading to the cottage, and the dame hastening to meet him, the happy old couple greeted each other affectionately.

"Oh, Mark," said the dame, "I be so glad thou'st returned, for I have been most

anxiously waiting for thee. I have gotten ev'rything ready for thee. There be the nice hot bread, and the fat bacon, and the beans, and the tatees. And there be thy pipe to smoke, and thy jug o' yale to driuk. And Tabby Tom be a sitting in thy old arm chair in the chimney corner a winking an' a blinking all out of one eye; and our dog Frisk be a sitting in my old chair opposite, looking very wickedly at Tabby Tom's tail, as much as to say he'd like a mouthful on't. But thou be'st tired I do reckon."

"No, no, dame," answered Mark, "the poor lab'rer man ne'er be tired you know while there be work for him to do. Rest be only for his betters; the poor man mun seek his till he do sleep 'neath the green grass turf in the old churchyard. But I mun stand grumbling here, when I have so many comforts to make me contented and happy. I promised to take thee to the Hazel Dell, my good old lass, and I will be as good as my word."

"Ees," said the dame, joyfully, "I know'd thou would'st, Mark. God bless thee for thou hast ever been a good old soul to me. Our Phoebe, and Henry Ashford, and all the lads and lasses, and the fine folks of the village and country round will be there; and there will be such romping and joking, and dancing and singing. And we shall all be so happy, and—and so—oh, dear, I be in such a pucker I don't know what to do with myself."

And the poor old woman was indeed in high glee, and in a great bustle, and being totally unable to restrain her feeling, she laughed till she cried, and then laughed and cried together in a breath.

"Lor bless thy merry, happy old heart, dame. I would not lose thee for all the *Hinges* of gold," said Mark.

"I know thou would'st not, my good old mon, and I do hope that the same day that do call thee away to another and a better world, will also take me with thee. But we mun be sad, Mark, I must in doors and brush myself up a bit, and put on that han'some new high crown cap that our Phoebe did make me, with the deep lace, and the pretty blue and pink ribbons. And that beautiful flower-pattern gown with the deep flounce, and all the fine thingy-myjigs and what-you-may-call-'ems about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mark, "why my poor old lass will look so smart and so handsome like, that, ecod! I should na wonder if she wur to captivate some of the young men there."

"La, Mark, thee don't say so, dost thee? returned the old woman, laughing good humouredly. But I mun forget thee. No,

thou must wear thy best shoen, with the silver-plated buckles, and thy white-ribbed hose, and thy Sunday kerseymere small-clothes, and thy daisy-pattern waistcoat, and thy best sky-blue coat with the large buttons as big as dollars, and thy broad-brimmed white hat with the blue ribbon round it. Then we shall look as smart and as fine as some of the great folk, I do reckon.

"To be sure we shall, dame," coincided Mark, smiling; "but come, come—let us in."

With these words the old people entered the cottage to partake of the repast, and to prepare themselves for the evening's festivities.

There was a brief pause, only broken by the murmuring breeze among the foliage, and then a light and faltering form was seen slowly to approach the cottage, every now and then looking cautiously back, and listening, as though she was fearful that some one was watching her.

It was Phoebe, but so changed was her demeanour, and the expression of her features to what they had appeared, when, all rosy and buoyant with health and spirits, she had quitted her happy home in the morning, that it was almost difficult to persuade oneself it was the same fair and happy being. The roses had fled her cheeks—the light and brilliancy of her eye was dimmed—there was a nervous quivering about the lips, and her bosom seemed to throb and swell with some powerful inward emotion.

Slowly, hesitatingly, tremblingly she advanced, then paused again irresolutely, and pressed her delicate hand upon her forehead.

"My heart trembles—my courage fails me," she ejaculated, in a faint and tremulous voice. "I feel as though I were the guilty perpetrator of some hideous crime, shuddering fearful on the brink of discovery. Oh, happy home of childhood, why do I now falter on your threshold, and fear to raise the latch of your humble door? What fatal spell has taken possession of my senses and tempts me to take the desperate course I am this night bent to pursue? To what have I pledged myself? To quit this happy tranquil scene perhaps for ever; to leave the fond and faithful Henry, the companion of my childhood, to misery and despair. To abandon the revered authors of my being, those doating, aged parents who have no other hope to live for but their only child, and to throw myself into the arms of a stranger? Monstrous thought! All Merciful God, direct me how to act!"

Again she paused, and leaning against the trunk of an old tree which grew near, and on which herself and Henry had carved their names in childhood, pressed her

hands upon her temples in painful thought. Again she slowly approached the cottage-door, and as she did so the happy laugh of her parents from the little parlour; thrilled to her heart, and made her tremble more violently than ever.

"Ah, 'tis their merry laugh," she cried, happy in the unconsciousness of approaching evil. And shall I turn their mirth to grief and heartrending anguish, and bring their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave? Oh, no, no, filial love and every virtuous feeling of nature revolt at the idea! 'Tis not too late to retract the rash promise I have made to Lord Selborne, and—mother—father, dear, dear parents, thy child—thy Phoebe will never forsake ye, or give ye cause to hate and curse her memory."

Bewildered, distracted, irresolute, she once more staggered forward, but was compelled to stop, and drew her breath with difficulty.

"I cannot—I dare not meet them," she said, "I must shrink appalled from their looks of scrutiny, and tremble to divulge my thoughts. Oh, Selborne, why, oh, why did ever we meet?"

She had now approached so close to the cottage-door, that she could plainly distinguish the voices of her parents as they conversed together, and that, if possible, added to her agitation.

"'Tis useless," at length she again gasped forth, "my trembling limbs refuse their office; I cannot leave them at least without one word at parting."

The dame and Mark now came from the cottage, dressed in all their holiday finery, and when poor Phoebe saw them, she drew hastily back into the shade, and her heart swelled to bursting.

"What dost thee think of I now, Mark," asked the dame, eyeing herself from top to toe, with every feeling of satisfaction; "don'tee think that I do look mortal fine and smart like?"

"Yes, dame," laughed her husband. "I could almost fancy thou wert a squire's lady. But, come along, my old lass, Phoebe, Henry, and all of them be anxiously expecting us, I'll warrant; for the bright harvest moon be risen thou see'st, and do smile upon their innocent sports and gambols. Come, dame, oh, wa shall spend such a happy night of it."

Unable any longer to remain concealed, or to control the conflicting thoughts which crowded in her mind, our heroine rushed wildly forward, and sunk in her mother's arms.

"My bairn—my own dear bairn," exclaimed her mother, in a voice of the most indescribable emotion, and embracing her affectionately.

"What, Phoebe, lass?" demanded old Mark, "why be'st thee not in the Hazel Dell, with Henry and all the rest of the company. Thy mither and I be going there and we'll have a dance with the youngest of them, too, eh, dame?"

"To be sure we will, Mark," replied his wife, her furrowed, but gentle features glowing with the pleasure which she anticipated, while every word that her and the old man uttered in their heartless simplicity, went like a dagger to the heart of the distracted, wavering Phoebe.

"I say, Phoebe," continued the old woman, "how dost thou think thy old mither do look now, child, in all her finery? Don't this beautiful cap, which thou didst make me with thy own pretty fingers, become me? And this handsome new gown with the tucks and flounces in the last new fashion. I shan't look much amiss, I reckon, for an old woman."

"Ees, ess," said Mark, smiling, "I say, Phoebe, won't thy mither form what they do call a *magnitude o' distraction*? Ha—ha—ha!"

"Oh, torture most exquisite. I cannot bear it," said our heroine aside, her heart ready to burst, and in vain struggling with her feelings. "Father—mother, in mercy spare your unhappy child!" she supplicated aloud.

"Why, Phoebe—Phoebe, my dear bairn," cried her mother, with a look of surprise and anxiety; "what be the matter with thee? Thou'rt pale and tremblest—thou'rt not well; come, come, child."

"Now, Phoebe, lass," interrogated Mark, "why be'st thou so sad and agitated loike? Thou dost sob and weep, too. Come, come, cheer thee, my bonny bairn; tears do but ill become thy pretty bright eyes, where sunny smiles of joy and innocence be only wont to play."

"Can I longer act the hypocrite?" gasped forth our heroine, aside, and almost choking. "Can I thus continue to basely deceive the poor old souls? My brain is bewildered, and a nameless feeling of dread and dismal foreboding thrills through every vein."

"Thou dost not answer, Phoebe," said the old man, fixing a keen and penetrating look upon her, "and thou dost shrink from me and thy poor old mither, as though thou hadst cause to fear our scrutiny. What means this?"

"Now, Phoebe," said the dame, tenderly, and imprinting a fond kiss upon the pale cheek of her trembling, agitated daughter; "now, Phoebe, dear, what be come to thee? Speak, child—speak, for it do rack thy old mither's heart to see thee sad."

"No, no—'tis nothing," faltered the poor girl, still struggling with her feelings. "I—I'm a silly girl—'twas only a slight nervous feeling—a sensation of pain; but I'm better now—I'm well—I'm happy; yes, yes, very hap—"

Convulsed by emotion, after a painful effort, she sank on her knees at the feet of her parents, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Poor lass," exclaimed Mark, affectionately and compassionately, at the same time raising her from her humble posture, "it doubtless be the heat of the weather that has overcome her; or, mayhap, she and Henry have had a bit of a tiff loike, dame, as it be very nat'ral for all lovers to do. I know he were a little bit cross'd with her, and jealous in the morning. But you will soon kiss and be friends again, Phoebe. Arouse thee, child, and return with us to the Hazel Dell, where I warrant thou'st left Henry ready to break his heart, the silly lad. Come—come."

"No, no—not now," cried the poor girl, fearfully agitated, and unable to conceal her confusion. "I—I will follow you presently and—my heart will burst!" she groaned, aside; I cannot—dare not tell the fatal truth."

"We'd better not worry the poor child, Mark," observed the dame; "She will soon recover herself when alone, I reckon. There, Phoebe, dear, get thee into the cottage, and set thyself to rights. Don't be long before thou comest to the Dell, and we'll be so happy, and so merry. Good-bye, Phoebe, good-bye. Now, old man."

"Father—mother—dear parents!" sobbed Phoebe, with the most uncontrollable emotion, and clinging to them, "oh, may all bounteous heaven bless ye!"

"Thou art a silly girl, Phoebe," said her father, after having embraced her, "but I never saw thee so before. Come, dame, let us be jogging. Phoebe will soon follow us, won't thee, lass?"

"Yes—yes," gasped forth our heroine, I—"

"That's a good girl," said her mother, kindly; "I know thou'lt not long be happy away from thy parents. Come along, Mark, let's hasten. Thou'lt not be long, Phoebe? Dear—oh, dear, Mark, don't we both look smart? I reckon our appearance will cause quite a sensation."

With these words, the poor old people departed, leaving Phoebe in a state of mind which it would be impossible for any language adequately to describe.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FINAL STRUGGLE—THE FATAL RESOLVE.

For a few minutes after her parents were gone, Phoebe remained transfixed to the spot like a statue, and with a mind bewildered and agonized.

"Gone—gone," she at length cried, looking wildly around her, "and they know not the storm which is about to burst upon their devoted heads. Oh, I am most cruel—artless, to deceive them thus. 'Twill surely break their poor old hearts."

At that moment the old clock in the cottage struck the hour of nine, and, at its well known sound, Phoebe started, and trembled more violently than before.

"The time fast approaches," she said; "dear old clock, shall I ever again listen to your familiar tones, or hear your well known tick? Oh, I cannot leave this sacred spot! Still, why should I hesitate? I cannot—will not doubt the truth and honour of Selborne; he will make me his bride—his lawful bride, and I shall soon return as Lady Selborne, and remove my dear parents from toil and poverty to wealth and happiness. Delightful thought, let me no longer delay."

As she thus spoke, she took a letter and a pocket-book from her bosom, at which she gazed for a few moments with much earnestness, and then continued—

"I will leave these few parting lines of explanation that I have penned upon the table in the cottage, and this pocket-book, which contains fifty pounds in Bank of England notes, a present from Lord Selborne to my dear parents. It will be a little fortune to them. They will be delighted. Let me be quick, ere my resolution fail me."

She quickly entered the cottage, and as she did so, Lord Selborne, who had been concealed behind the trees and listening to her, appeared, attired in a travelling dress, and with looks of mingled triumph and impatience.

"My well laid scheme is complete," he said, "and my bird is fairly caught, though she has been a long time hesitating and fluttering about the net. But soft, she comes."

He once more concealed himself behind the trees, and Phoebe, with a pallid countenance, and a palpitating heart, returned from the cottage; in the agitation of her feelings, neglecting to fasten the door.

"'Tis done," she said in a faint voice, "the painful trial is over. Now let me be gone while yet courage nerves me. Dear scenes of my happy childhood, for a time

farewell, and kind heaven pardon me if I am acting wrong."

She knelt, and with clasped and upraised hands, and tearful eyes, solemnly and earnestly invoked the protection of the Supreme.

"My hopes revive," she ejaculated, once more rising to her feet. I'm firm—dear Selborne, I am thine! Faithful to my promise, I come—I come!"

She turned to depart, and sank overpowered by the various feelings that struggled in her breast, in the arms of Lord Selborne, who had come hastily from the place of his concealment.

"Dear Phoebe," said the libertine, as he pressed the trembling form of the blushing maiden to his bosom, "the hour is come—all is ready. I come to claim the fulfilment of your vows, and you will not—cannot deceive me. See, sweetest," continued he, presenting her a heath-rose, which he had plucked from its stem, "I bring you this simple offering of my affection. It is beautiful as the wild flowers that deck your hair, and sweet as the love I bear you."

"It is sweet, indeed," replied Phoebe, "but its sweetness must wither ere night closes around. It is beautiful, but its beauty is short-lived as the love evinced by man. Let not this, then, be the type of our attachment. Bring me the delicate evergreen, the sweet flower that blossoms through the year, and I will say as I wreath it in my hair, 'The violets have bloomed and died—the roses have flourished and decayed—but the evergreen is still young, and so is the love of my Edwin.' Friend of my heart, you cannot—you will not deceive me? I live but for you, you are my hopes—my thoughts—my existence itself. If I lose you, I lose my all; I was but a solitary wild flower in the wilderness of nature, until you transplanted me to a more genial soil; and you can never deceive—never break the fond heart you first taught to glow with passion. Edwin—my own dear Edwin!"

With a burst of convulsive emotion, she threw herself senseless in his arms, and he covered her face with his kisses.

"I have triumphed," he exclaimed, "my hopes, my wishes are realised. She is mine—mine!"

He raised her inanimate form in his arms as he spoke, and quickly bore her to the spot where he had a post-chaise waiting. A few minutes more, and the unfortunate Phoebe Mayfield, with her guilty betrayer, was hastening to London.

Scarcely had the wily deceiver, with his hapless victim quitted the spot, when Henry Ashford, with wild and disordered looks, and a faltering, agitated step—his whole demeanour, in fact, evincing the strong tempest

of torturing feelings that, with such uncontrollable violence was raging in his mind—hurried towards the cottage. He paused, and cast an anxious and melancholy look around, then pressed his hands upon his forehead, and seemed to meditate what to do.

Again he aroused himself, and advanced a step or two, still gazing anxiously, and with looks of melancholy and despair towards the humble dwelling of that fair being for whom he would freely have sacrificed his life, and who had now, alas, been tempted to abandon it, probably for ever. His heart was full to bursting; and tumultuous thoughts crowded upon his fevered brain, and added to the agony of his soul.

On quitting his sister in the abrupt and distracted manner that has been described in a previous chapter, he had rushed with the wild air of a maniac in the direction of the spot where he had seen Lord Selborne and Phoebe; he was worked up to the greatest pitch of excitement—reproaches for Phoebe—curses for the libertine were already on his lips, and had he then encountered them it is more than probable that something fatal would have taken place, but on reaching the place, where he had caught a hasty glance of their receding forms, they were nowhere to be seen.

Rage and disappointment filled his breast—he struck his forehead passionately with his clenched fist, and, for some moments, hesitated what to do; he hurried on in the same course which he imagined they had pursued, but all traces of them were lost, and the most fearful doubts and suspicions rushed upon his mind.

For some time he continued to wander, he scarcely knew whither, but not being able to discover anything of those whom he so anxiously sought, he slowly, and with a desponding heart, as has been shown, bent his agitated steps towards the cottage.

“What fearful foreboding is it which thus holds my senses in subjection, and makes me tremble to proceed?” he soliloquised. “Phoebe is not in the Hazel Dell, and I have not seen anything of her, and the villain—who I fear has obtained too powerful an ascendancy o’er her heart—in the way. My heart misgives me. There must be something wrong.”

He walked quickly up to the cottage, listened, and then looked eagerly in at the window.

“There is no one to be seen,” he said, “all is still as death; the place seems lonely and deserted; my fears increase. Ah, the door is open; let me enter, and end at once this anxiety and suspense.”

He stepped into the little room, so clean and neat in its lonely appearance, and his

heart throbbed violently with fear and expectation. The dog, which knew him well bounded playfully towards him, and as well, as he could evinced his pleasure at seeing him.

Henry cast his eyes anxiously and hastily around the room, and they fell upon the open letter which Phoebe had left upon the table. With a trembling hand, scarcely knowing what he was about, he snatched it up, and eagerly glanced at its fatal contents; then a groan of agony and despair escaped him, and with a burst of the most violent emotion he rushed from the cottage, with the letter in his hand, and gazing vehemently upon it.

“The damning proof is here,” he exclaimed; “she’s gone—she’s lost—ruined! The libertine has triumphed, and the innocent Phoebe Mayfield—my Phoebe is his victim. Oh, wretched girl!”

He covered his face with his hands, and deep and heavy sobs escaped his breast.

“Mocking fiends surround me,” he wildly cried; “vultures are gnawing at my heart, and madness is upon my brain. And yet, it may not be too late; let me fly to save her, and wreak my vengeance on the accursed villain’s head.”

With a frantic step he hurried away, and rushed into the road, dashing on at the top of his speed, unknowing whither he was going, and without any settled purpose.

From the back road passing by the abandoned dwelling of Phoebe Mayfield, Captain Beaufort had watched the elopement with mingled feelings of satisfaction and envy, and as the post-chaise rolled rapidly on its way he said—

“By Jove, Selborne has stolen a march upon me, and has captured this rustic beauty by a *coup-de-main*. They are now on the high road to the gay metropolis, and here am I, who have hitherto been so successful in all my amours, left solitary, neglected, and alone.”

At that moment a cry of grief and anguish, in the tones of a man’s voice, smote his ears, and looking in the direction from whence the sound proceeded, he perceived the agitated Henry Ashford approaching, with a wild and hurried step.

“So,” soliloquised Beaufort, “’tis Henry Ashford, Lord Selborne’s unsuccessful rival; he looks half crazy, poor devil. His lordship has given the quietus to his hopes, at any rate. Ha—ha—ha.”

The libertine turned aside, indulging in brutal mirth, and the unfortunate Henry quickly arrived at the spot, and started with mingled feelings of disgust, contempt, and indignation on beholding the unprincipled friend of that nobleman whose name he had



so much reason to curse. The captain, however, affected not to observe him, and having exhausted his laughter, proceeded carelessly to hum the burden of an amatory song, at the same time playing with the chain and seals of his watch.

"Aye," ejaculated Henry, in a tone of bitter sarcasm, "thou art merry, Captain Beaufort; no doubt you have good cause for mirth. The devil and his imps, they say, do ever exult at the downfall of innocence and virtue. Where is that accursed villain, thy base associate in crime?"

"You are excited, my dear fellow," replied the captain with the greatest coolness and composure; "pr'ythee keep your temper—be cool—be cool. To be sure, it is devilish provoking to be jilted by the little divinities, but then you know, my dear fellow, women are as plentiful as blackberries."

No. 3.

"Taunting devil!" exclaimed Henry, passionately. "I will no longer tamely brook thy unmanly insolence. Brutal ruffian, thus do I resent it!"

With these words, he dealt the London exquisite, and abandoned libertine, a violent blow, which felled him to the ground, and he then quitted the spot and hastened on his way to the Hazel Dell.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FATAL SCENE IN THE HAZEL DELL.

"Confound the country bumpkin," said the captain, gathering himself to his feet; "to have the consummate presumption to lay his vulgar, filthy hands on an officer and

a gentleman. "Twas cursed provoking to think I had not my sword, or demme, I would have pinned him to a tree like a—cockchafer."

Having thus given vent to his outraged feelings, the proud and ignorant aristocrat departed in a different direction to that which Henry had taken.

While these events were going on, a scene of unusual happiness and gaiety was taking place in the Hazel Dell, which was now brilliantly lighted by the harvest moon. The rustics were all in their glory, cheerful strains of music, mingled with loud shouts of laughter resounded on every side; everybody trod it merrily in the giddy mazes of the sprightly dance; Giles Stubbles and Patty making an extraordinary display, and in which no one took a more active part than the eccentric, but kind-hearted Bobby Bristles, whom we have not before introduced to the reader, but who might be considered rather an important personage, being the village cobbler and politician.

Nothing could be possibly more interesting and animated than this scene of rustic festivity; and the romantic spot in which it took place added greatly to the general effect. Long avenues of stately trees, whose clustering branches and emerald foliage glistened in the moonbeams, opened to the view on every side, and in which various groups of happy peasants were disporting gaily, to the merry simple sound of the pipe and tabor. Numerous parties were seen romping on the green, others were hurrying to the spot from various directions, while the aged people were seated at intervals on the grassy mounds, enjoying the cheerful sight, and indulging in social conversation. The air resounded with joyous laughter, not a gloomy face was to be seen in that happy assembly. Who could have anticipated the sad termination to the revels which was fated to take place?

From another part of the Dell might be heard a simple chorus of male and female voices, singing the following appropriate words—

"Merry in the Dell, all gay and free,
Tripping lightly, merrily, sprightly;
Joyous, happy we will be,
While the bonny harvest moon shines brightly.

"Sorrow shall not enter here,
Anxious thoughts away—away;
In harmless revel banish care,
Let's be jovial, let's be gay.

"Then merry in the Dell, all gay and free,
Tripping lightly, cheerily, sprightly;
Joyous, happy we will be,
While the bonny harvest moon shines brightly."

Honest Bob Bristles, however, could not resist the present opportunity to make an oratorical display, and at the conclusion of a dance, in which he had been one of the most boisterously active in the scene of hilarity, he thrust himself forward, and waving his arm to command silence, with much self-importance in his style and demeanour, he said—

"Now then, my friends, if you'd not alwus remain in a state of *poly-tickle* darkness, now's the time or never for your *re-gin-eration*. No longer continue to—"

"Come, I say Measter Bristles," interposed Giles, cutting the eloquent cobbler short in his political harrangue, "we ben't a going to listen to your nonsense 'bout *poly-ticks*, o' which you know no more than your own lapstone. We've met here for fun and jollity, an' we'll have it, too, won't we lads?"

"Aye—aye," shouted several of the party; "bravo, Giles!"

"What, yer won't listen to me?" said the indignant Bristles, "well then, as I don't wish to insult yer, and would confine myself within the limits of true perlieness, I've merely to say that you're a set of the' most stultified, uncultivated, and ignorant boobies I ever met with."

This speech was received with good humoured laughter, in which the political cobbler joined as heartily as the rest.

"Now, my lads and lasses," said one of company, a worthy farmer, "we must keep the game alive. See the bright moon do smile cheerfully on your mirth, so we mun let our spirits flag. Dance away—dance away."

The happy party needed no urging to give due effect to this advice, and they had again arranged themselves for the dance, when Mark Mayfield and his dame—strutting with no little pride in her rustic finery, and her benevolent countenance beaming with smiles—arrived, and were received with cordial shouts of welcome.

"Thank ye—thank ye, lads and lasses," said old Mark, shaking hands with everybody, "I be glad to see ye all so merry and so happy. Here be my old dame, ye see, in her best bib and tucker, and a looking mortal foine loike. My Phoebe will be here presently, an' I do warrant she'll be one of the merriest and happiest among ye. But where be Measter Harry? I don't see him here."

"No, neighbour Mark," replied Ralph Hawthorn, the farmer before introduced to the reader, "Harry Ashford has not been here all the evening, and I do wonder at it, for where there be a merry making a going on, he and his pretty Phoebe be sure to be

first in the party. But no doubt they'll both be here presently; so come, my old friends be seated while the lads and the lasses enjoy themselves to their heart's content.

The old people immediately acceded to this proposal, and took their seats under the wide spreading branches of an ancient tree, and from whence they could have an uninterrupted view of the festivities.

And now the merry dance was resumed with increased spirit, and the mirth and enjoyment were at their highest pitch; laughter shook the sides, and pleasure beamed from every eye; sylph-like forms, and manly rustics tripped lightly, merrily, to the sprightly measure, when a loud exclamation of anguish suddenly interrupted the joyous proceedings, and Henry Ashford, with the fatal letter still open in his hand, rushed to the spot, and stood motionless, speechless, gazing vacantly on the astonished revellers.

Mark and the dame immediately arose, and anxiously approaching him, the former eagerly demanded—

"Why, Harry, what be'st the matter with thee, lad? Why dost look so wild, and clench thy fist? Where be Phoebe?—where be my bairn?"

"She is gone—fled," replied Henry with a violent burst of emotion; "left home—the poor old dame—thou—all for the accursed villain who hath led her astray. Thou art childless now—childless now, and I—oh, misery and despair!"

His broad chest heaved with the overwhelming power of his feelings, and he sobbed convulsively.

"Gone—fled?" gasped forth Mark, gazing at him with stupified and bewildered amazement and incredulity; "our Phoebe, no, no—it be false! Thou'rt mad, Harry—thou'rt mad!"

"It be too true," groaned the young man, "oh, faithless girl."

"Speak, Harry," cried the poor old woman, in trembling accents, and the smiles of joyous hope at once forsaking her venerable features, "speak, Harry, I charge thee, on thy life. My Phoebe—my dear bairn, oh, say she—"

"Here," interrupted Henry, in a voice half stifled with emotion, and giving the fatal letter which had been left in the cottage by our heroine, to Mark, "read, Mark, read the fatal truth."

"No—no, I cannot; I be no scholard," replied the old man, with increased agitation, and a ghastly paleness overspread his countenance, his lips quivering, "dame you—"

"Oh, how my poor old heart trembles," gasped forth the dame, as she took the letter, and endeavoured to peruse the contents, "it

do throb—throb; tears gush to my eyes, an' I can't see to—ah," she suddenly shrieked, whilst fearful convulsive emotion shook her frame, "those dreadful words—'Mither—father, for awhile farewell; I—I—' Oh, it be true—it be true! She be gone—torn from us; the pretty flower we loved and cherished so fondly, be stolen from our aged bosoms; we shall nae more see her sunny smiles—nae more listen to the gentle music of her voice. Phoebe—Phoebe!—my poor winsome bairn!"

With an hysterical laugh the unhappy mother sank in the arms of her aged partner—she fixed one last, one earnest look upon his distracted features, and, with a groan of heart-rending agony, her eyes closed for ever.

The sounds of merriment entirely ceased in the Hazel Dell, the soft, melancholy murmuring of the night air among the foliage, alone broke the death-like silence which prevailed. Even the bright moon, as if in sorrow, for a brief interval hid its pale face behind the hazy clouds.

The villagers stood bewildered, astonished, and awe-struck: Henry was appalled, transfixed as a statue; while poor old Mark was paralyzed to the spot, gazing wildly, vacantly, and with stupified incredulity upon those ghastly features, so lately beaming with smiles of heartfelt happiness.

There was a fearful, solemn pause, and then Mark, in a voice whose deep tones of bursting anguish thrilled to the very souls of all who heard it, sobbed—

"Dame—mither! look up—oh, speak to me!—in mercy let me again hear the tones o' thy loved voice, that for so many years has gladdened my heart to listen to! No, no, she will never speak more; the fatal blow be struck; her heart be broken; she—she be *dead*. I ha' na bairn, na dame now; na one to love or care for me in the dreary winter o' my days! The poor old mon be all alone—*all alone*."

CHAPTER VIII.

TIME'S CHANGES—THE OLD STONE HOUSE.

Let us draw the curtain before those melancholy scenes.

Months have rolled away since the dismal occurrences recorded in the previous chapters—and strange and painful have been the changes effected in that brief space of time.

The moon shone brightly as ever in the starry canopy of heaven above the Hazel Dell; the soft breeze whispered among the branches of the old trees; and the wild

flowers grew and bloomed in all their sweet luxuriance; but the merry sounds of innocent mirth no more there were heard; light hearts bounded not to the tones of joy; fairy forms of simple innocence and beauty no longer might be seen, romping in sportive play upon the green sward, or tripping gaily in the fantastic mazes of the dance. It seemed as if the spirit of mirth dared not to desecrate the sacred spot, since Death had there so solemnly and emphatically asserted his awful sway.

The poor old dame no longer with anxious looks of love and joy watched for the return of her aged partner from his daily toil, or listened to catch the sound of her fair child's cheerful voice upon the air, as she hastened to receive the fervent kiss of motherly affection. She slept peacefully beneath the green grass turf in the old church-yard, where the wild flowers bloomed in reverence to her memory.

The little cottage garden was abandoned to neglect and wild desolation; weeds grew where blushing flowers once abundantly were seen, wafting the breath of fragrance around. The window-shutters were closed, no more was heard the ticking of the old clock—the bark of the faithful dog Frisk, or the purring of Tabby Tom in the old arm-chair in the chimney corner; the cottage, the once happy home of Phoebe Mayfield and her parents was closed, and for months had remained untenanted, abandoned to gloom and silence.

The aspect of the village, too, participated in the general change that time and circumstances had wrought within the last few months. It seemed, in fact, all but deserted. Giles Stubbles and his pretty Patty had quitted their former situation at the old Plough inn, tied the nuptial knot, and, accompanied by the eloquent Bob Bristles, had gone to seek their fortune in London.

Ever since the elopement of Phoebe, misfortune had lowered upon Henry Ashford and his gentle, amiable sister. He had been unable to settle to work as he had been wont to do—illness overtook him, and the little money which himself and Amy by the strictest parsimony had been enabled to hoard, was soon exhausted, and he could not now obtain that employment which he had so long neglected; the consequence was that nothing but misery and poverty seemed to await him and his sister in their native place, and with a few pounds which the worthy farmer, Ralph Hawthorn was so kind as to lend him, and, assuming the name of Stephen Mordent, he and Amy also took their departure to the gay metropolis.

The regiment of which Lord Selborne was

the colonel, had long since left the neighbourhood; nothing had been heard of the misguided Phoebe since the fatal night on which she had abandoned her home; and her name was never mentioned by any of the old inhabitants of the village, except with words of sorrow and regret, not unmingled with reproach and censure.

But where was the wretched, bereaved father? What had become of him? He saw the cold remains of his unfortunate wife deposited in their final resting-place, beneath the yew tree which grew near the ivy-mantled porch of the village church, that had stood for ages; he arranged the simple flowers upon the grassy mound of earth that covered it, he knelt, he prayed, he wept there, then quitted the neighbourhood which from the earliest days of youth he had inhabited, and alone wandered no one knew whither. The heart-felt sympathy of all went with him, and many were the fervent wishes expressed that heaven would watch over him, and afford the balm of consolation and resignation to his broken spirit in his heavy affliction.

He was absent for several weeks, and various were the fears and speculations as to the fate which had befallen him, knowing the distracted state of his mind, and his all but destitute condition, for, with scorn and repugnance, he had refused to make use of a farthing of the money which Phoebe had left in the cottage on the night of her departure.

At length, Mark Mayfield returned to Dewsbury—but, alas, what an altered man; there was no longer that hearty look of robust health upon his features—they were wan, wasted, careworn; his cheeks were hollow, the fire of his eye was extinguished, his hair had become white as silver, and his limbs had lost their late almost youthful elasticity; his form was bent and attenuated, in fact, in the course of a few short months twenty years seemed added to his age, and his oldest friends could scarcely recognize him.

His first visit was to the grave of his wife, where he knelt, and there remained in tears and prayer, from earliest dawn even till the dark shadows of evening had descended upon the earth, and then, with slow, reluctant step, he bent his way to his lonely cottage.

As he seemed anxious to avoid society, no one offered to obtrude upon his sorrows, though all pitied him, and gladly but delicately contributed to his necessities, for his days of labour were now evidently past.

He remained at the cottage about a week, when one day the neighbours found the

shutters of the casement closed, the doors fastened, and all silent within.

Having knocked for some time, without receiving any answer, and fearing that something had happened to the poor old man, they forced the doors, but he was not there, he was gone, together with the dog, the cat—who, during the time of his former absence, had been fed by the villagers—the old clock, and all the principle articles of furniture.

What had now become of the unfortunate man? They made strict inquiries in the neighbourhood, and for miles around, but could ascertain nothing. No person had seen anything of him—his disappearance, and his whereabouts was a mystery that no one could solve. Some feared that he had laid violent hands on himself, others imagined that he had wandered to London in search of his misguided daughter, but no satisfactory explanation whatever could be obtained, and thus a month passed away.

About a mile from the village, and on a wild barren moor—o'er which the bleak winds swept, and the traveller cared not to travel, especially after nightfall, for many robberies and murders had been there committed—a low, gothic building had been known to stand for more than two centuries—dark, solitary, lonely, and deserted, save by the bat and screech-owl, who held undisputed dominion in its dreary courts and chambers.

It was called The Old Stone House.

This place was shunned with superstitious dread by the peasantry, for strange and fearful stories were told of the crimes that had been perpetrated within its walls, and of the ghastly troubled spirits that haunted its gloomy precincts.

No one claimed it—no one for many years had inhabited it, and it was suffered to fall into gradual decay—a sad and dismal memorial of the past.

Suddenly, in the darkness of the night, a glimmering, faint and flickering light, as if proceeding from the rays emitted by a small lamp, was seen moving about in the different dust-encrusted casements of the ancient building, and at intervals, mournful, plaintive cries of mental anguish might be heard above the howling blast. The vulgar and timid attributed these sounds to the frightful phantoms of their own disordered imagination; but the more sensible portion of the community concluded that some wretched being had there sought shelter. This idea was verified. For an instant, and an instant only, the miserable form of poor old Mark Mayfield made its appearance at one of the entrances to the old house. 'Twas there he had shut himself up from the world

to brood over his sorrows. It was indeed a grim old building, standing alone on that dreary moor—save a few withered, leafless trees, that still grew out a wretched existence at intervals around it. It was only two stories high, but of considerable extent, and it was said to have several gloomy vaults and subterranean passages, though, in order to ascertain that fact, no one, for many years, had ventured to explore them, or even to enter the building.

It was ruined and decayed in many parts, but the principal portion of it had bravely withstood the ravages of time, and seemed likely still to last for ages. Thick moss covered its walls, and its small painted casements, half mantled in ivy, gave it altogether a most sombre appearance.

The ruins of this strange old house were still standing to within the last few years, and the following romantic legend connected with it, is yet extant.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LEGEND OF THE OLD STONE HOUSE.

Many years previous to the period at present referred to, the Old Stone House was the residence of an aged, mysterious man, and his only relation—a grand-daughter—a young female of surpassing loveliness.

The name of the old man was Adam Grasp, but he was more commonly called "old Adam Lovegold," for he was supposed by his penurious habits to have amassed great treasure, which he had secreted in some place which defied discovery.

More than ninety winters had silvered the thin, lank hair of this miserable old man; but though wretched and attenuated his form, and faltering his step, his eye flashed with more than youthful fire, and his very soul seemed occupied entirely with one deep, one dark, one darling object. Rags and filth were upon his disgusting person, and plenty never cheered his miserable board. Fire was a stranger to his grate, and comfort knew not his dwelling.

Yet, amidst all this misery, there was one who was comparatively happy, and who, in the goodness and purity of her heart, shared, without a murmur, in all his miseries, and sought to soothe and cheer the old man in the long—long hours of his dreariness. This was his lovely grand-daughter, the mild, the meek, the affectionate Ellen.

And even that cold, insensible, isolated heart could not help yearning towards her; even that barren soul could not be entirely dead to the numerous virtues of that beau-

teous girl. Deprived of her parents when very young, she had from the earliest days of childhood, resided with her ancient relative; guided his feeble footsteps in his melancholy rambles—which were confined to the dreary heath and adjacent wood—soothed his pillow in the hour of sickness, and deprived herself of those comforts, those little enjoyments which her youth naturally required, for the purpose of being near that wretched old man.

That he had wealth Ellen felt convinced, but any allusion to it made him a maniac. Once when he was ill, and she ventured to endeavour to prevail upon him to purchase some necessary refreshments, he raved forth—

“Girl—girl! are you mad? What do you advise? Buy luxuries—bah! Know you not I’m poor—miserably poor? But the busy knaves whisper that I’m rich—their murmur I have gold—that I hide it in the bowels of the earth; the wretches—liars! Ellen, you do not believe them, child? Say you do not suspect that I have money.”

And the old man grasped the arm of Ellen with his bony fingers, with convulsive emotion, and looked up in her face with awful intensity. Ellen endeavoured to reassure him, and to calm him into reason and confidence, but it was some time ere she could banish the alarming impression from his brain. She avoided speaking to him on the same subject in future.

There were times, too, when the paroxysms of Adam Grasp were perfectly hideous; when his mind seemed to be imbued with some ghastly presentiment, when he would rave of some fearful prediction which told him that, “he would live to be a hundred years old, and then become a murderer! That he would never die a natural death, but that his bones would blanch and moulder in a gibbet, for idle gazers to mock, revile, and curse his memory.”

Vain then were the endeavours of Ellen to quiet the demon that had taken possession of his distempered imagination; his ravings were frightful, and he would weep and pray by turns for the poor girl not to lead him into temptation—not to urge him to that dreadful crime.

In such moments, Ellen would weep bitter tears of anguish and regret; but charitably attributed his dreadful malady to his great age, and in private she would firmly pray to heaven to calm the wild tempest of his thoughts, and to let his dying hour be one of tranquility and happiness.

When the frenzy of his feelings had ceased, he would bestow upon her all the simple fondness of a child, press his livid lips upon her cheek, and cry—

“Oh, forgive me, child, my own sweet Ellen. I am a feeble, weak, aged man; do not chide the poor old sinner, Ellen, for he loves thee—dearly, fondly loves thee.”

Still, in spite of all, Ellen could not help feeling an anxious curiosity to know the truth about the old man’s supposed secret wealth—an irresistible impulse to fathom the mystery.

Often, long after she had retired to rest, she would be awakened by the continuous opening of her grandfather’s chamber-door, then she would hear him totter forth—see the trembling rays of his lamp through the chinks in the walls of her room, and hear his wild and awful laugh of unnatural mirth ringing like the shriek of a spirit on the still midnight air.

What could he be doing? What could cause him to leave his wretched pallet at that unseasonable hour? She longed, yet feared to watch him.

Years she withstood this strong temptation; till one night—one fatal, dark, tempestuous November night—the night on which Adam Grasp had attained his hundredth year—she could contain her curiosity no longer.

It was a fearful night, the blue forked lightning flashed in at every broken casement of the Old Stone House, the wind howled in long hollow gusts through its winding, dreary passages, the thunder rolled in deafening peals, and high above it all was heard the loud, wild laugh of old Adam Grasp.

Ellen arose, and hastily throwing a loose garment over her trembling form, took up her lamp, cautiously unlocked her door, and with noiseless footsteps issued from her chamber into the dreary passage. The wind quickly extinguished her lamp, but so well did Ellen know every inch, and nook and corner of the place, that she proceeded with perfect ease and safety. She reached the door of her grandfather’s chamber, a glimmering light flickered in it, and his wild laugh rung in her ears, and was re-echoed along the dismal passages in fearful tones. Ellen trembled, and supported herself for a moment against the stone pillar of the door. She almost repented of the task she had undertaken.

But it was too late to retreat.

She placed her eye to the key-hole, and then beheld the wretched old man seated at a low wooden table, which was covered with small heaps of glittering gold and silver. Again, and again, old Adam would count the different piles, and every time he did so, his awful laugh would sink the voice of the tempest into insignificance.

Then he would talk to himself, then to

his money, and then he would arise, and with frantic motions and gestures dance, in the mad delirium of his joy, round the table on which it was piled.

At length, he tied it all in a number of small canvass bags, and placing his light in a lantern, he clutched the treasure under one arm, took up the lantern, and moved towards the room-door.

Ellen hastily concealed herself behind the pillar till he had passed from the apartment, and then cautiously followed at a distance.

Often did the old man stop to listen if any one was pursuing him, and then he would cast his eager eyes around to see if he was watched, but the darkness of Ellen's dress screened her from observation.

Several apartments did he traverse, and many a dark passage that Ellen had never been in before.

At length, in one he stopped, and, placing his lantern on the floor, seemed to be looking for something. Presently she saw him raise a trap-door, and cautiously descend, leaving the door open. She followed; she also descended, and found herself in a damp cellar, or vault.

Her aged relative had unlocked an iron chest there, in which having deposited his treasure, he was laughing with all the unnatural frenzy of a maniac.

Ellen was petrified with astonishment; a cold, shivering faintness came over her; she could not move from the spot on which she stood.

Suddenly the old man turned. The light of his lantern fell full upon her—he beheld her! He started—demoniac fury blazed from his inflamed eyes! He clutched a knife, and rushing upon her, in a fearful voice, shrieked—

“Ah, wretch!—spy!—traitress! Thou hast discovered all, and thy mad curiosity hath sealed thy doom! The prediction rings in mine ears, but I mock it, laugh it to scorn; ha, ha, ha! Die—die! for thou shalt not divulge my long hidden secret!”

The next moment Adam Grasp had become a murderer.

* * * * *

Early the following morning, suspicions having been excited, a party from the nearest village broke open the doors of the old man's dwelling, and tracked their way to the scene of crime. There they found the wretched Adam Grasp, surrounded by his wealth, and laughing madly o'er the mangled form of his innocent victim.

The unfortunate Ellen was not quite dead, she lived long enough to relate the horrid particulars, and to pray for mercy on

her assassin. Her ashes repose in the old churchyard.

But the prediction was fulfilled.

“Adam Grasp lived to be a hundred years old, and then became a murderer! And his bones blanched and mouldered in a gibbet, for idle gazers to mock, revile, and curse his memory.”

Such is the legend of “The Old Stone House of the Barren Moor.”

CHAPTER X.

THE WANDERINGS OF MARK MAYFIELD IN THE OLD STONE HOUSE.

And in that lonely, wretched dwelling, in which the frightful tragedy just recorded had been enacted, poor old Mark Mayfield had secluded himself from the society of his fellow creatures. 'Twas there he brooded over his terrible misfortunes, wept scalding tears of fruitless anguish and regret, when no eye but that of heaven could see him, and hourly prayed for death.

In the gloom of that dismal chamber, probably the one in which the guilty Adam Grasp had many years before passed the principal portion of his moody hours, pondering o'er his schemes of avarice; that room which the lovely and unfortunate Ellen had often trod; early and late poor old Mark Mayfield sat, in maddening retrospection of the past, and utter despair of the future. There was no relief, no respite to his sorrows, but every hour the dark mantle of fate seemed to gather more closely around him.

It was a large stone room, in which he had arranged some of the most prized antique articles of furniture, which he had by night removed from his cottage. There was the poor dame's arm-chair, now unoccupied, placed in one corner of the large fire-place, and his own, in which he constantly sat, opposite. There, too, was the old clock, now silent, the small table at which Phoebe had been accustomed to ply her needle, singing merrily all the time, and the little three-legged stool on which she had so often sat when a pretty lisping child.

The old and favourite pictures of the cottage chamber also decorated the walls of this cheerless room—chief of all was the portrait of Phoebe.

Upon this the wretched parent would sit and gaze, with earnest eyes, for an hour at a time, and not a word, not a sigh would escape his lips—not a muscle of his face appeared to move—not a tear might be seen to tremble in his eye; but his heart beat

violently, and there was a mountain of woe upon his mind which seemed to absorb and suspend his every faculty, and to press him down, and drive him to madness and despair. Then when at last the flood-gates of his insupportable grief were opened, he would cry and laugh alternately, and sometimes a curse would rise to his lips, but he ever checked himself ere utterance could be given to the rash and fatal words.

He never quitted this lonely dwelling save at night—for, when his habitation was known, his humble, but charitable friends would leave him both food and money, and written words of kindness and sympathy, in some part of the ruins where he would be sure to find them—and then he would slowly and mournfully bend his footsteps to the old churchyard, when he thought no human eye could behold him, and, on the humble grave of that poor old woman—of whom he had been the playfellow in childhood, and the happy husband for nearly forty years—give unrestrained indulgence to the unceasing violence of his grief.

One evening, it was one fine autumn evening, and the harvest moon was again shining in the bright clear sky, the old man took it into his head to extend his rambles, although he carefully avoided all those places where he was likely to meet with any one who knew him.

Many were the spots, most sacred to him (albeit they called up melancholy recollections—because they had been the favourite haunts of the dame and Phoebe,) he visited, and long and sadly he lingered about them, thinking of the past, and uttering words of lamentation and regret.

But the scene which wrung his heart the most, was the Hazel Dell; the scene which had witnessed the awful death of his unfortunate wife in the midst of the festivities. There the thoughts that rushed with overwhelming force upon his brain were indeed maddening; he could have wept tears of blood and every groan, every sigh which escaped his breast, came from his heart, that heart which was ready to break with the intensity of his sorrows.

It was long ere he could tear himself away; and it was then not till he had resolved frequently to visit the place again, when he thought no one could see him, or attempt to intrude upon him.

On returning to his lonely dwelling, poor Mark felt fatigued with his exertions, and hastily seated himself in his old arm-chair to rest himself. The moon was gleaming in at the ivied casements, and gave an almost unearthly aspect to the ancient apartment and the furniture it contained.

The different figures and strange heads,

executed on the walls, and the gothic pilasters that supported the roof of the room, seemed to look more grimly down upon him, and strange and varied were the thoughts and ideas which they engendered in his mind.

The wind whistled dismally along the extensive passages and galleries which led to the different chambers of the ancient building, and Mark could almost imagine that he heard the wild and frantic laughter of the wretched Adam Grasp, as he gloated over his gold, or the groan of agony, the earnest prayer for mercy and forbearance from his murdered victim.

Still it was no emotion of fear which predominated in the old man's breast; no, his thoughts, his feelings, nay, his very nature were now associated with scenes of gloom and horror; he had learnt to laugh at the howling blast, and view with reckless eye the fierce raging tempest in its mightiest wrath. The beauties of nature, and the changing seasons had lost all charms for him. The sun's bright beams yielded no light to the impervious darkness of his crushed and broken hopes; imparted no warmth to the eternal winter of his desolated bosom. For him the flowers bloomed in vain—the green fields possessed no verdure—the luxuriant foliage clothed the branches of the forest trees unnoticed—the sweet carol of the song birds at early morn, which once he had so delighted to listen to, while proceeding to his daily toil, were now by him totally disregarded, unheeded, unheard. His mind had become a dreary desert—his heart, cold, callous, morbid, insensible.

The poor old man's hopes, and joys, and wishes were buried in the grave of his aged partner, in the ruin of his unfortunate daughter; his thoughts were alone of them—he seemed to have lost all consciousness of everything but his own utter misery, loneliness, and desolation.

Yet—strange perversity of feeling—there were times when the poor afflicted man would awaken, as it were for a brief interval, from this fearful lethargy to all the tender emotions of his best nature, when his careworn features would relax from their stern and stolid expression—would become irradiated with a transient beam of sunlight, the tears would chase each other down his pale and furrowed cheeks, he would clasp his hands together in convulsive agony, his lips would move as if in prayer, although no sound escaped them, and he would sob and weep like a child.

At such times it must have been even more melancholy and painful to contemplate that aged, grey-haired man, than even in



the moments of his most morbid wretchedness, or wildest phrenzy.

And gloomy, silent, meditating, poor old Mark Mayfield sat, on the night to which we are now referring; his eyes seemed fixed on vacancy, he appeared lost to consciousness, yet were torturing thoughts too busy in his bosom; still had they no settled subject to dwell upon, all was wild confusion and obscurity, such as is often created by the attempted remembrance of some troublesome and painful dream.

At length, wandering from this intricate maze of mental anguish, for the time being his whole gloomy ideas and ponderings seemed to concentrate and fix themselves upon the strange wild legend of the old house, within whose dreary walls he now sat; and the wretched tottering form, and

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cadaverous features of the ancient Adam Grasp, were presented as vividly to his imagination as if he had known him in his lifetime. In fancy he saw him seated by the faint and glimmering light of the midnight lamp, when no eye watched him save that of heaven—seated there, perhaps, in the very room he now occupied—brooding over the accumulation of more wealth, starting at the least sound, even the gentlest sighing of the wind, fearing the approach of thieves, or perchance the voice of conscience sometimes whispering in his ears, recalling the guilty past to his memory, or reminding him of the fearful prediction which hung like a ghastly shroud upon his future destiny.

So strong a hold had these ideas taken of old Mark's brain, that he almost involuntarily gave expression to them in words.

"Poor fool, he wur mad, he must have been mad to hoard up golden heaps of dross to barter away his earthly happiness an' his soul's salvation. Did he ne'er have ought on which to fix his love but gold? Had he nae good old dame, to smile meekly, kindly upon him in his moments o' sadness—to whisper to him sweet words of hope an' cheerfulness, and to attend upon him wi' fond an' anxious care in the hours o' sickness? Had he nae bairn, fair, loving, good an' innocent to—no, no," he added, with a wild burst of agony, the tones of his voice reverberating fearfully throughout the ruined building, and starting to his feet, "he ne'er had child to deceive, disgrace, abandon him, an' break her poor old mother's heart; he wur not so accursed, an' therefore even in the midst o' all his care an' misery he wur happy—he wur happy."

A convulsive tremor shook his feeble limbs as these words escaped his lips, his haggard features were distorted, his eyes flashed with an unnatural expression, and large drops of perspiration stood upon his wrinkled brow.

For a minute he stood, with his eyes fixed upon vacancy, but as though they encountered some fearful object, then with a deep and hollow groan of mental agony, the heart-broken, lonely man clasped his forehead with his feverish hands, and again sunk helplessly, exhausted in his old arm-chair.

In this manner a quarter of an hour elapsed; he remained in the same attitude, there was not the slightest movement in his limbs, and but for the hysterical sobs that ever and anon escaped his breast, any one who could have seen him at that moment might have imagined his earthly sorrows were at an end—he had breathed his last, or that they gazed upon a statue.

The storm which had long been raging was now at its height—the rain beat violently against the broken casement—the half unbinged oaken doors creaked and clattered in the howling wind; ever and anon the forked lightning darted awfully into the dreary room, and terrific peals of thunder followed each other in rapid succession, shaking even the sturdiest part of the building to the very foundation, and threatening every moment to level the ancient ruins with the dust.

The violence of the tempest at length aroused the old man, and he started to his feet as though suddenly awaking from some frightful vision. He glared for a moment round the room, and then eagerly took up his lamp, as a strange idea flashed across his disordered brain.

He felt a sudden curiosity to examine

those old chambers, and passages, and underground places, which doubtless for many, many years had not been explored, and so strong was the hold which this singular idea had obtained on him that he could not resist the temptation.

The solemnity of the hour, or the horrors of the storm, could not deter him, but first opening a drawer in the table, he took from it a bunch of old rusty keys, which he had probably picked up in the ruins on some former occasion.

He then moved towards the room-door, which, however, he had no sooner opened, than the wind sweeping along the dreary passage beyond extinguished the light he carried.

This reminded him that it was necessary for him to adopt some other method, unless he would be left in total darkness in the vaults or passages of the ruins, and he therefore put a light in a small lantern, which he had handy, and he then proceeded more confidently on his way.

He walked to nearly the end of the passage on which his chamber opened—it was long and winding, and seemed to wind half way round that wing of the building—and paused before a low wooden door on the right hand, and which had often attracted his attention, in consequence of its ancient appearance, and the curiously grim-looking heads carved upon the oak pillars that supported it.

There was a massive lock upon it, very rusty and much worn with age, and Mark had to try nearly the whole bunch of keys before he could find one to fit it, and when he did, he was obliged to place his lantern on the floor, and exert all his strength before he could get it to turn in the lock.

At length it did so; the door slowly yielded, and opened with a harsh, creaking, sluggish sound, at the same time a cloud of dust—the accumulation of years—was blown by the wind in the old man's face, and nearly blinded him, and the bats—disturbed from the locality, of which they had long held undisputed possession—flapped in anger about his ears.

Mark, however, took but little heed of this, and having hastily shaken off the dust as well as he could, he entered the room, and held the lantern above his head in order to take a better survey of it. It presented nothing remarkable, save the broken remains of some very old-fashioned furniture, and he therefore crossed it to an opposite door, which he perceived was standing ajar. The room which this revealed was large, lofty, and almost perfect. There was a large oak table in the centre, on which was a book, the leaves of which were rotten and mil-

dewed, and dropped to pieces on the touch, and the remains of a small canvass bag. Near the table was a cushioned high-backed chair, and in an opposite corner was an iron chest, which was open and quite empty.

This was all that the room contained. It was dimly lighted by a small iron-barred casement, very high in the wall, and which gave it a gloomy, dungeon-like appearance.

Mark paused, and looked half fearfully around the dismal place, and, as he thus gazed, busy thoughts and strange imaginings flashed across his brain. This, no doubt, had been the private sitting-room of the guilty Adam Grasp. All that it contained was calculated to strengthen that impression on his mind. The empty chest which had probably contained his ill-gotten gold; the chair in which he had sat while pondering o'er fresh schemes of avarice; the ledger in which he had most likely, with such anxious care, duly entered every coin, and wherein he could at a glance peruse the amount of his wealth, all served to confirm the opinion Mark had formed; and as these thoughts arose, the wild prediction, and the awful manner in which it was stated to have been fulfilled, arose most vividly to his recollection. He could not help shuddering, and, for the time being, his mind was diverted from his own sorrows and anxieties.

At length, he slowly moved towards the opposite side of the room, with the intention of pursuing his search, when his attention was suddenly drawn to the flooring boards, which seemed to yield to the weight and pressure of his feet. Stooping down to examine them more minutely, after clearing away the thick carpeting of dust which had accumulated upon them, he discovered what he was convinced was a secret trap, so ingeniously constructed that it might have passed undetected, had it not been from some similar accident as that which had revealed it to him, and from the circumstance of its not having been properly secured the last time it had been raised, from which he inferred that the person had either been alarmed, or was unused to the mechanical working of the trap.

The curiosity of Mark was now more than ever excited, and, kneeling down, he immediately applied all his strength to the raising the trap, which was a task of some difficulty from the circumstance of the dirt and damp which had gathered, and choked, and corroded round it, but at length it slowly yielded, and with a powerful effort he succeeded in raising it.

A strong current of unwholesome air, and a thick cloud of dust followed this action, and the old man was blinded and half suffocated by it. This having subsided, he took

up the lantern and looked eagerly down into the opening beneath. The feeble rays of the lamp could not at first penetrate the intense darkness, but at length he perceived a narrow flight of steep wooden steps, broken in several places, and which evidently led to some passage or vault.

Mark again hesitated, and for the first time a sensation nearly allied to dread came over him. How many, many years had probably passed away since human being had ventured to intrude upon those dreary subterranean precincts; likely enough no one since that awful night when the miser murderer was discovered madly raving in the wild phrenzy of his horror and remorse over the mangled body of his unfortunate and innocent victim. The wind moaned dismally from the place, and the thunder roared, as if in angry disapproval of the curiosity which urged Mark Mayfield to proceed.

Yet why should he fear? He had never wilfully injured human being, and therefore might boldly face any horror it might be his lot to encounter. Rebuking himself, therefore, for his temporary weakness, and leaving the trap open behind him, and so secured that it could not close, and thus probably prevent his being able to return, he carefully began to descend, but pausing every now and then to listen to catch the slightest sound, as though he suspected that he might be watched, or even—extravagant as was the idea—that somebody might be concealed within that dark and lonely retreat.

At length he reached the bottom of the steps, and holding up the lantern, the better to accelerate his view, he found himself in a long passage, paved and vaulted, the walls of which were blackened by time, dripping with unwholesome moisture, and in many places crumbling to ruins. There was a death-like silence pervading the place, and it had a gloomy sepulchral aspect, which imparted a cold feeling of awe to the breast.

Mark, however, proceeded along the passage to a low archway or recess at the end, which had formerly been closed in by a door, now broken, by the decay of age, from its hinges, and lying shattered upon the ground, covered with the crumbling rubbish which had fallen upon it from the roof.

Mark looked eagerly beyond, but the darkness was too great to enable him to distinguish anything clearly, and he therefore stepped beneath the doorway, and advanced a few paces into the place.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ADVENTURE IN THE VAULT—THE PROPHETIC DREAM.

Opening the lantern, Mark let the light fall upon the place, and he then beheld himself in a large stone cellar, of prison-like appearance, and the roof of which was supported by massive pillars. The walls were green with damp and mildew, and the ground was covered with filth. In a niche at the further end of this vault or dungeon there stood an iron chest, similar to the one in the room above, the lid was standing open, and it was quite empty.

Mark gazed around him with breathless curiosity, and a multitude of ideas crowded upon him; from the description given in the legend, and which he had often listened to with the deepest interest, he could have no doubt that this was the scene of the fearful tragedy, that it was here the unfortunate girl, prompted by anxiety to unravel the dark mystery of his actions, had followed her aged relative on that fatal night, and being discovered fell a victim to his ungovernable rage and inhuman vengeance.

The voice of the tempest, which still continued to rage in all its might, again smote his ears from above, and added to the gloom and terror which irresistibly crept over his senses. Suddenly the light from his lantern fell upon an object in the centre of the place, which rivetted his immediate attention, and he advanced nearer to it. It was an old upright stone, resembling a tombstone, with a dagger, and a skull, and crossbones, and an inscription—now quite illegible—rudely carved upon it.

Mark cast his eyes towards the foot of this remarkable stone, and still beheld a deep impression in the hardened earth, like that which would have been caused from the struggling of some fallen human form. Nay, more remarkable still, the print of a hand was distinctly traceable.

In spite of his efforts to restrain his fears a cold shuddering ran through the old man's veins, and he almost dreaded to breathe, or to look around him, as though he stood within the solemn precincts of the dead. The whole truth was at once presented to his mind. That old stone, the impression in the earth, told the awful tale as forcibly and as distinctly as words could relate it. Mark's first suspicions were confirmed; this was the scene of the murder—it was there that the poor girl struggled desperately in the monstrous grasp of the assassin—'twas there that she had piteously and frantically implored for mercy in vain; that old grim

stone marked the spot where the hideous crime had been perpetrated.

For a few minutes Mark remained with his eyes fixed upon this sad memorial, and unable to move from the spot. Was it fancy?—the delusion of disordered senses, wrought upon by the remembrance of that dreadful event, or was it the hollow moaning of the wind along the subterranean avenues that deceived him? But he suddenly started, trembled, and stared aghast, for at that moment a low dismal groan, as if proceeding from some troubled spirit, seemed to vibrate in his ears, and to come from the vicinity of the old stone which marked the spot of crime.

The effect this impression had upon him was too powerful for him to divert himself of, and, as he still glared fearfully towards the old stone, to his bewildered and distracted imagination, a supernatural light seemed to play around it, and gradually shadowy faces, which at length assumed the ghastly appearance of reality became visible to him. He looked, and looked again, and still the terrible delusion haunted his sight, and he could fancy that he heard strange and unearthly mutterings near him, with which were coupled the names of his wife and daughter. In vain he struggled against the extraordinary influence which this wild fancy had obtained over his wondering reason; he could not shut out the awful idea from his imagination; it continued to pursue him, exciting his feelings to the highest degree; a cold tremor crept over him and shook his limbs; he uttered a cry of agony, and hastily seizing his lantern—which he had placed for a minute on the ground—and pressing his other hand upon his forehead, he staggered from the spot, reached the steps, though how he knew not; hurriedly ascended them, and, rushing into the room above, hastily let fall the trap door after him, and sunk tremblingly and agitated in the old arm-chair before mentioned, with his head buried in his hands, and resting on the table.

Still he could not shut out the fearful idea which had taken such singular hold on his senses. The imagining sounds continued to ring in his ears, and to suspend all his faculties in terror.

The storm had now entirely ceased, and a dead silence rested on all around, which was not even broken by the murmuring voice of the wind.

In this state of bewilderment poor old Mark remained for several minutes, till aroused by the sound of the old church clock, and rising hastily, he was proceeding to the door, in order to return to his own room, when glancing around the place, his

eye fell upon an object on the opposite wall which had before escaped his notice.

It was an old picture, indistinctly revealed in the dim obscurity of the situation in which it was placed, and Mark advanced nearer to it, in order to inspect it more narrowly. He shuddered with an unaccountable feeling of awe and dismal foreboding as he did so. It was a portrait, and that of a female, young and beautiful, but with such a melancholy, yet innocent expression of features, that Mark's eyes became immediately riveted upon them, and his very soul became completely absorbed in the contemplation, as if by some powerful and irresistible fascination.

The moon, which had hitherto been obscured, now emerged from behind a cloud, and its light, streaming into the room from the casement, full upon the portrait, imparted to it an aspect life-like, yet most unearthly.

Mark continued to gaze, and his agitation increased. The eyes seemed fixed earnestly upon him, with a look of mingled tenderness and supplication, the lips appeared ready to move as if to address him, and he could almost fancy that the fair bosom so beautifully displayed in the painting swelled and heaved with resuscitated life.

Brighter, and still brighter, shone the moon, revealing every lineament of the beauteous countenance represented in the portrait more distinctly; what strange delusion, what wild imagination was it that now took such extraordinary possession of Mark Mayfield's senses? As he looked, the features he gazed upon appeared to undergo a change. Gradually they assumed a shape—an expression—a resemblance terribly familiar to him, sinking deep into his very soul, and fearfully agitating his distracted breast with their magical influence. Merciful powers! either his mind wandered, and madness had seized upon his brain, or it was the face of his unhappy daughter, his once fond, and beloved, and innocent Phoebe that he now gazed upon, but so piteously painful, so full of sorrow was the expression of the look which she seemed to fix upon him, that it penetrated the inmost recesses of his heart, and swelled his bosom to bursting.

A moment, and a moment longer only, the poor old man looked at the vision his disordered brain had created; his limbs became convulsed, a deep groan escaped him, and then pressing his hands before his eyes to shut out the torturing sight, he rushed madly from the room, and reaching his own lonely chamber, with sobs of agony threw himself into his chair, and sunk into a state bordering upon stupefaction.

Gradually the cares and anxieties of the day, and the extraordinary exertions and excitement he had just undergone, had their effect upon his senses, he felt exhausted, worn out with lassitude and thought, a heavy stupor, or drowsiness came over him, which he found it impossible to resist, and throwing himself back in his old arm-chair he sunk to sleep.

But the slumbers of Mark Mayfield were not calm and undisturbed; strange objects arose to his imagination, mingled scenes and recollections of the past, and torturing prophetic visions of the future, and he frequently started, and gazed vacantly and with stupified bewilderment around him.

Happy scenes of former days, now, alas, for ever vanished, flitted before his dreaming senses; hours of domestic peace, and joy, and prosperity that could never more return; bright hopes and pleasures now for ever enshrouded in the dark clouds of evil destiny, and renewed in fancy, but to drive him to madness and despair.

Once more he thought he sat within the little parlour of his humble cottage, surrounded by all those domestic comforts that had ever made that home so dear to his heart. Again he saw the kind and benevolent features of his good old dame, smiling cheerfully upon him, as they sat together conversing after the toils of the day were over. He gazed upon the beauteous face and form of his innocent child, glowing with youth, and virtue, and all the purity of filial affection; he felt her fair arms entwined around his neck, her loving kiss upon his aged cheek—he listened to her artless conversation, and his ears dwelt enraptured on the soft and simple melody of her voice, as she warbled, with exquisite taste, some well-known country ballad.

Then the old man fancied that himself and his wife were seated outside their cottage door on a lovely summer evening, gazing on the beautiful prospect before them, now clothed in all the glories and variegated tints caused by the last departing rays of the setting sun. The village bells were ringing forth a merry peal, the villagers were hastening over the green fields to the festive dance in the Hazel Dell, and the happiest amongst them were Phoebe and her lover, young Henry Ashford.

As if by magic, the scene was once more changed, the sounds of gladness no longer saluted his ears and ravished his senses; no more he beheld the joyous rustic revellers as they tripped it lightly and gaily over the green sward, making the air resound with their shouts of merriment, or the fair forms of those beloved beings who were most precious to his heart. But, on the contrary,

he found himself alone, cold, wretched, and weary, at the solemn hour of midnight, standing upon a wild and dreary heath, with the fierce winds whistling and howling around him, and a keen sense of his own abject misery and loneliness. As far as his eyes could stretch it was one dark void—one desolate scene of horror and despair. He knew it not, or by what means he had come there, or why he was so entirely deserted; yet had he a dreamy idea of something dreadful having happened, and which he trembled to endeavour to recall to his memory.

He thought that he called mournfully on the name of his wife; a deep sigh, followed by a hollow wailing cry, such as might have issued from the grave of some departed being, was his only reply, and he looked in vain for that aged partner, and that fair child, in whom all his hopes and joys had been so fondly centred. With a feeling of the most unutterable agony, he thought he clasped his forehead, and called distractedly on the name of Phoebe. The voice of the gathering storm answered him—a thick, hazy mist gathered before his eyes, which gradually dispersed—a pale, supernatural light supplied its place, towards which the old man gazed with eager earnestness and expectation, and there, before his appalled and astonished eyes, wretchedly clad, with pale and haggard features, and ghastly looks of agony, supplication, and despair, he beheld his unfortunate daughter kneeling, with clasped hands, as though imploring for mercy and forgiveness.

The old man fancied in his dream that his emotions at this sight arose to a pitch of excitement beyond endurance, that a burning fever seemed to seize upon his brain, his heart was full to bursting, and that his bosom swelled with mingled feelings of sorrow, shame, and indignation. But no feeling of pity, he imagined, entered his breast; there all was stern, cold, insensible, and inexorable.

“Abandoned wretch!” he thought he exclaimed; “destroyer of all my fondly cherished hopes; murderess of thine aged mother; dare not to sue to me for mercy; begone; and be hopeless misery, ceaseless remorse, and bleak and hideous despair, thy just though terrible punishment!”

He thought he heard her wild shriek of agony on the midnight air—that he beheld her ghastly frenzied looks, he endeavoured to rush towards her, but some invisible power seemed to hold him back, and he remained transfixed to the spot, like a statue.

The spell of sleep was broken, and in the horror of the moment he awoke.

CHAPTER XII.

OLD MARK MAYFIELD AT THE GRAVE OF HIS WIFE—A STARTLING SCENE.

Mark started from his chair, and glared wildly and vacantly around the ancient room, in a state of stupified unconsciousness, for the moment not knowing where he was, and unable to persuade himself that his senses had only been under the influence of a torturing dream, and that what he had thus in imagination witnessed was not a terrible reality. But a fearful recollection of the solemn and exciting events of the night occurred to him—the building, to his disordered brain, seemed haunted by unearthly beings, who mocked at his despair, and exulted in his misery. That child whom he imagined was now lost, fallen, and degraded, appeared to hover near, ready to disgust him with her loathed presence, and in spite of the lateness of the hour, scarcely knowing what he did, his mind was so bewildered, he seized his hat, hurried from the room, and retreated from the house into the open air.

The storm had entirely ceased, all signs of it had disappeared, the black and ponderous clouds that before obscured the sky were dispersed, and the moon was shedding her brightest beams on all around.

Not a human being was to be seen, not a sound disturbed the silence of the night, as Mark hurried along totally regardless of whither he was going, and without any settled purpose.

At length he paused to take breath, and looking eagerly before him, he discovered that his footsteps had accidentally been directed to the old churchyard, in which the cold remains of his wife reposed, and which he had before visited in the evening.

That sacred place, and the solemnity of the hour, were in perfect unison with his feelings on the occasion, and, after a few moments' reflection, he proceeded slowly towards it, looking back to see that no one was watching him.

At length he arrived at the hallowed spot, and, with a feeling of awe and reverence, entered within its solemn precincts. Not a sound was to be heard, not even the murmuring of the breeze among the foliage of the trees that grew in various parts of the churchyard, disturbed the deep silence which reigned around, and the white tomb-stones shone forth distinctly and ghastly in the moonbeams.

The church was a venerable structure, and one that seldom failed to attract the attention and excite the interest of the tra-

veller who happened to pass near it. It was a low, unpretending-looking building, like most old country churches with a gothic porch, which, like the walls, was thickly covered with moss and ivy, which added to its effect, and gave it a still more ancient appearance. The windows were of rich stained glass, with sacred and emblematical figures, and which were also half-concealed by the thick clustering ivy that grew around them.

Near the porch grew an aged yew-tree, and under its sombre shade was the humble grave of poor old Dame Mayfield. It was there she had always expressed a wish that, if it should please the Almighty to take her before her husband, she should be buried.

The wild delirium of the old man's feelings was somewhat calmed, as he slowly, and with trembling footsteps approached the grave—above which a mound of earth was raised on which the wild flowers grew in abundance—and kneeling down, with clasped hands, and upraised eyes, for a few minutes became lost in solemn meditation, not a sound, scarce even a breath escaping his lips.

"Cold, cold, beneath the green grass turf, where wild flowers bloom and weep their tears in dew-drops to her memory," at length he said, in tones so truly plaintive and impressive, that every word evidently came from the deepest recesses of his heart. "And I, too," he continued in the same melancholy voice, "I, too, have wept till the fountain of my grief be almost dried up, and every other feeling be lost in dark, in deep, and sullen despair. Poor old dame, I shall ne'er hear thee speak more—no more behold thy gladsome smiles of welcome on returning from the daily toil. Oh, 'twur hard, very hard, to tear thee from me, and leave me here to weep and mourn alone. Oh, why did I not die—why did I not die?"

The poor old man pressed his hands convulsively on his forehead, and for a few moments became completely lost in an agony of intense grief.

There was a death-like pause, when suddenly Mark was aroused from his lethargy of thought, by loud and vulgar laughter, which seemed to proceed from the further end of one of the pathways leading to the church, and which sounded truly awful and disgusting in that sacred place, and at such an hour; and the old man started hastily to his feet, and gazed in the direction from whence the noise seemed to proceed, while his bosom heaved and swelled with indignation and horror, at this brutal desecration of the spot where reposed the ashes of the dead.

The laughter was repeated, followed by

oaths, and then Mark, looking more earnestly towards the spot from whence the sounds came, beheld the tall figures of two men—both enveloped in military cloaks—approaching along the foot-path towards the spot on which he stood; their footsteps faltered, and their gait was staggering, evidently from the effects of a recent debauch; and Mark felt shocked, and his resentment and disgust increased as he watched them.

Not wishing them, however, to observe him, until he had ascertained something more about them, he drew back into the old church porch, which was partially sheltered by the branches of the yew-tree which grew over the grave of his wife, determined to watch the noisy, and apparently dissipated intruders narrowly.

They staggered forward till they nearly approached the humble grave of the poor old dame, and Mark was now perfectly satisfied, if even he had not been convinced before, that they were both labouring under the effects of intoxication, and that they had considerable difficulty in maintaining their equilibrium.

The light of the moon, and the position in which he stood, enabled him to have a distinct view of their persons, though their backs being turned towards him, he could not observe their features, and there was that in the figure of one of them which struck him as being familiar to him. He gazed more narrowly, and the impression gained strength in his mind, but when he heard him speak, the tones of his voice struck upon his ears with disagreeable effect, and he was convinced that he was not mistaken.

At some observation that fell from the lips of his companion, he turned suddenly round; the moonlight shone upon his countenance, and his features were distinctly revealed to Mark, who started back as though a serpent had stung him, or his eyes had encountered some frightful object, on beholding them; they were the features of Lord Selborne's guilty associate, the unprincipled and dissipated Captain Beaufort.

His eyes were bloodshot, and his cheeks were flushed with the intoxicating drink which he had evidently been taking in such copious libations; and his features altogether bore an expression that was particularly disagreeable and disgusting.

The old man trembled with mingled emotions of surprise, shame, and indignation, and he clutched his hands vehemently together, and bit his lips in the intense agitation of his feelings. All the horrors of his melancholy destiny, the ruin and desertion of his darling child, and the untimely death of his poor old dame, rushed with tenfold

force upon his distracted brain, as he witnessed the hallowed grave of his aged partner desecrated, polluted by the hated presence of the abandoned aristocrat, and he drew in his breath, and watched him with glaring eyes, and swelling wrath, ready to spring upon him, and wreak his rage and resentment on his head.

With staggering gait, and ribald conversation, the captain and his companion approached near to the grave, and the words they uttered fell distinctly on the ear of Mark.

"How confounded stupid we must be, Selby," observed Captain Beaufort, "to wander to this dismal old churchyard, at this time of the night, too. I positively begin to think that we must have taken a *leetle* too much wine, and I begin to feel rather queer in the upper regions."

"Aye," replied the other, "and I do not feel myself quite so steady on my legs as I should wish to be, and can hardly keep my equilibrium. I have broken my shins, too, in stumbling over these cursed grave-stones."

"Damn all rustication, I say," remarked Beaufort; "I am heartily tired of it, and shall never be happy till I return to London and the fascinating Lady Grace Flutter, alias the Widow Wilding. Besides I am anxious to join Lord Selborne, and have the pleasure of his society, and that of his little simple beauty, Phoebe Mayfield, or Lady Selborne, as she is now called. That was a bold stratagem of his lordship, and was completely successful, though it broke her mother's heart, and, from all I have heard, has driven old Mark crazy. Poor old creatures, 'tis a pity they should have suffered the loss of the girl—who is now living in affluence and fashionable splendour—to have such a serious effect on them."

The impatience and indignation of the poor old man could endure no more; with a wild and frantic cry he darted from the place of his concealment, and springing with the sudden strength and vigour of youth upon the captain, he grasped him fiercely by the collar with one hand, and clenching his fist menacingly in his face, while his whole demeanour was violently agitated, and his features disturbed with rage and disgust, he exclaimed—

"Shameless libertine! villain! darest thou to approach the humble grave where rest the cold remains of my poor broken-hearted wife, to give utterance to thy guilty and licentious observations?"

"Mark Mayfield," cried the astonished and confounded captain, sobered in a moment, and with some difficulty releasing himself from the old man's grasp.

"Ees," replied Mark, in a voice broken

by sobs, and fixing upon Captain Beaufort and his dissipated friend a mingled look of sorrow, shame, and reproach, which shocked and abashed even such reckless, callous-hearted beings as they were; "it be the poor, aged, bereaved feyther o' that misguided girl, whom the base artifices of the wretch whom you call your friend, lured from her humble though happy home, and brought to ruin, shame, and degradation. Canst thou stand near the sacred spot where in death repose the ashes o' that lost, fallen one's broken-hearted mither, whose darling treasure, whose hope, whose greatest comfort that once innocent girl wur,—canst thou—darest thou, I say, stand here, in the presence o' the dead, and reflect upon the misery, anguish, desolation, and despair, thou hast so basely aided in producing, without a blush, or one feeling of remorse?"

"Well," replied Beaufort, with as much cold indifference as he could possibly assume, although he felt far from easy in the old man's presence, and his companion had withdrawn himself to a respectful distance, "it was certainly rather an unfortunate affair; and I am certain my friend, Lord Selborne, never anticipated such serious results. But you know, my old friend, that it cannot be helped, so it is better to endeavour to make the best of it. Your daughter has, I know, everything that her heart can desire, she is living in luxury and splendour; she has been introduced to the world of fashion, and the *elite* of society as Lady Selborne, and, if you would only address his lordship in becoming terms, I am certain he would handsomely provide for you in your old age, and thus make things perfectly agreeable to all parties concerned."

Indignation for a moment completely choked the utterance of Mark, and it was not without difficulty that he could keep his excitement within the bounds of reason.

"Brutal scoundrel! foul libel on the name and character of gentleman," he fiercely exclaimed at last, "to dare thus to add insult to the injuries I have received here, at the grave of my poor wife. Villain! thou shalt not do so with impunity; no, age hath not yet so enfeebled my arm but that I can resent so monstrous an outrage on every sacred feeling, and thus do I mark my scorn, disgust, and abhorrence."

As he thus spoke, he again attempted to grasp Beaufort by the collar, at the same time dealing him a violent blow; but his foot came in contact with something on the earth, and he stumbled and fell, his head striking against the edge of one of the grave-stones, and leaving him stunned and insensible.

"Poor old fellow," said the captain, with



a half-feeling of pity, "I'm afraid he has hurt himself. He was devilish insulting though, and I must say that I do not half like receiving a blow from a wretched menial."

"Certainly not, captain," observed Selby, "and I think we were a couple of ninnies to stay here and listen to him. But come, this place is enough to give any one the horrors, and if we remain here much longer I shall certainly have the ague."

Thus saying, he took the captain's arm, and hurried him away from the old churchyard.

Poor old Mark Mayfield remained in the same state of insensibility for some time, and when he recovered himself, he raised himself on his elbow, and gazed eagerly and vacantly around, for the moment scarcely remembering where he was, or what had happened.

No. 5.

The moon was now hidden by dark clouds, and the sombre aspect of all that met his sight, added to the solemnity of the scene. He felt a cold and shuddering sensation stealing over him, and the moaning of the wind which had arisen, fell upon his ears like the dismal wailings of some troubled spirit.

Then the heartless and cruel observations that had been made by Captain Beaufort, respecting his unfortunate daughter and her guilty seducer, recurred to his memory and filled his breast with the most torturing emotions.

"Let me no longer remain here, or I shall go mad," he cried, gathering himself to his feet; "Phoebe, cruel, wanton, abandoned girl, now living in shame and infamy with thy base destroyer, and never bestowing one thought upon that aged father whose hopes

and happiness you have crushed for ever, why—why should I not discard thee from my heart, and here invoke heaven's most terrible maledictions upon thy guilty head? But no; methinks I hear the solemn voice of her sainted mother calling upon me to forbear. I—I—no, no, I must not, dare not curse her. Let me begone, and again endeavour to hide my misery in my lonely dwelling."

After once more kneeling on the grave of his wife in silent devotion, he arose, and slowly and sadly quitted the dismal spot, and bent his way, buried in torturing thought, to the old stone house.

For some time, throwing himself into his old arm-chair, he abandoned himself to the same bewildering train of painful thought, but at length warned by the lateness of the hour, and worn out with fatigue and excitement from what he had undergone, he sought his chamber, and throwing himself, without undressing, upon the bed, obtained two or three hours respite from his cares and sorrows in sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEDUCER AND THE BETRAYED—MISGIVINGS.

We will now return to our unfortunate heroine and her betrayer, Lord Selborne, and relate all that befell her from that fatal evening when she abandoned her humble happy home.

For a short time after the chaise had hastily departed from the neighbourhood of the pretty village of Dewsberry, and was rolling rapidly along the road, on its way to the giddy metropolis, poor Phoebe remained in an utter state of unconsciousness, and Lord Selborne gloated with exquisite delight on the lovely features of his innocent victim, and again and again pressed warm kisses of transport upon her lips.

How he exulted in his triumph, and pictured to himself the unbounded happiness which was in store for him. No feeling of remorse entered his guilty breast at the reflection of the breaking hearts he had too probably left behind. No, he thought only of his triumph, and the gratification of his unholy passion, which he believed to be so quickly in store for him, and every proper sentiment and principle were stifled in that guilty anticipation.

"Beauteous flower," the libertine murmured to himself, as he still held the graceful though inanimate form of the simple rustic girl in his arms, and gazed rapturously on

her lovely features, so calm, so placid, in their innocence and purity, "beauteous flower," he repeated, "mine then is the proud and envied task to pluck you from your native stem, and transplant you in the soil of fashion, and its giddy pleasures. 'Tis mine to bask beneath the bright sunshine of your smiles, to listen to the fascinating melody of your voice, and inhale the sweet perfume of your breath in love's warm kisses. Oh, what nameless bliss is there in store for me. My brain turns giddy at the joyous thought."

He paused a minute or two and reflected, and suddenly a feeling of compunction stole across his mind, as he thought of the heartless act of villany and perfidy he contemplated.

The mind of Lord Selborne was not naturally depraved and vicious, but he had been ruined by being left at too early an age to his own uncontrolled will, and the artifices of bad associates, who, while for the sake of his wealth, fawned to him, sycophant-like, and flattered his vanities, gradually lured him away from the paths of honour and rectitude he might otherwise have trodden, stifled every manly feeling in his breast, and made him their unconscious victim and dupe.

There were times when conscience would arouse him from this mad, delusive dream of folly and vice, and he would feel disgusted with himself and his own misconduct; he would form the best of resolutions to reform, and become at least the being that his name and proud station in society demanded; but his abandoned companions, his staunch and enthusiastic friends, as they eulogised themselves, were ever at hand to instil their poison in his ears, and withdraw his thoughts from the desirable channel into which they had wandered. The intoxicating wine-cup did the rest, and thus did he gradually become lost to shame and remorse, callous to every feeling of probity and manly impulse.

There was no one who had long excited a more pernicious influence over him than the fashionable *roue*, and crafty, though really ignorant Captain Beaufort.

They had been companions from the earliest days of childhood, schoolfellows, brother-collegians, and Lord Selborne, who had the highest opinion of his young friend—who knew well how to play the hypocrite—had accustomed himself to pay the highest attention to his advice, and place the most implicit confidence in all he said or did.

Captain Beaufort seemed to be a villain by nature, to be born to be a foul blot upon society, and to contaminate and ruin all with whom he came in contact; and having the skill, the artifice, as has been before observed, to conceal his real vices under the most specious garb, it may well be imagined how a

man who was so very easily led astray as Lord Selborne, must suffer by his base example.

Yet in his heart did Beaufort hold his ready dupe in the most supreme contempt, and only pandered to his follies to suit his own vile purposes, and to prey upon his purse, his own fortune being extremely limited. The rather reckless and profligate conduct of many of the officers in the army of that day, and the unbounded licence they were accustomed to give to their vicious propensities, the reader may rest assured did not contribute to the improvement of the morals of either Lord Selborne or his guardian friend, and thus the former, hoodwinked and cajoled by the designing Beaufort, and his other unprincipled associates, gradually became entangled in that wild and giddy vortex, which seldom fails ultimately to hurry its unfortunate votaries to destruction.

It was not without extreme regret that his lordship had for the present abandoned Captain Beaufort, who was unable to accompany him on his journey, but he consoled himself with the thought that he would shortly rejoin him in London, and aid him in the furtherance of his nefarious designs against the unfortunate Phoebe Mayfield.

But to return to that part of our story from which we have thus necessarily briefly digressed.

"And yet," soliloquised Lord Selborne, "can I be the consummate villian to despoil this fair flower of its principal charms, and then to cast it from me, blighted, ruined, on the cheerless desert of the world, to wither decay and perish. Can I basely, cruelly deceive and betray one so fair, so fond and confiding. Destroy those bright hopes that, in the innocence and sincerity of her love she now cherishes, and leave her a poor lost, fallen, degraded being for the finger of shame and scorn to mock at? Monstrous thought; I shudder to entertain it."

He again paused, and torturing and conflicting were the reflections that haunted his mind.

"Surely," he muttered to himself, "I have not proceeded too far to retract, and abandon my guilty designs? Could I but form the resolution, while she is still in this state of insensibility, to return and restore her to her friends, I might still make some atonement for the temporary outrage I have committed on her and their feelings. But how could I meet the bitter reproaches of her aged parents—how endure the anguish of the poor girl herself? Besides should I not be laughed at, taunted, and despised by Beaufort and my other companions? No, no—I have advanced too far to recede, and let whatever may be the consequences, I must and will

pursue my designs to their ultimate accomplishment."

While indulging in these conflicting and guilty thoughts, the chaise continued to roll rapidly on its way, and it had already got to some distance from that humble but happy home, which our heroine had been so fatally induced to abandon. The night was fast advancing, but the moon shone brightly, and nothing could be more calmly beautiful than the season. A sweet refreshing breeze cooled the air, which had previously been so close and sultry, and Lord Selborne having opened the window of the chaise, it fanned the cheek of Phoebe, and sported among her glossy ringlets.

His lordship felt surprised that she remained so long in a state of unconsciousness and that the jolting of the chaise over a somewhat uneven road, did not arouse her. But she appeared to have gradually sunk into a calm sleep, and she breathed freely. He almost dreaded her awaking, for he hesitated to enact the part of hypocrisy and deception he had imposed upon himself. He, however, mustered all the resolution he could, and endeavoured to await the result calmly and patiently.

At length a gentle sigh escaped her lips, and she dreamed the name of her parents in dreamy but tender accents. The conscience of Lord Selborne smote him, and he again became uneasy and irresolute.

He watched the poor girl gradually revive and awaken with the utmost anxiety. At length she opened her eyes, and pressed her fair and delicate hands upon her forehead, as if bewildered, and endeavouring to collect her scattered thoughts.

"Dear father, my own affectionate mother," she sighed, in the most plaintive and touching tones, "your Pheebe can ne'er forget her duty to you, ne'er for an instant harbour a thought, or be guilty of the least act which can impart a pang to your aged bosoms. Think ye that child whom you have ever so fondly cherished, could deceive you, abandon you to misery and hopeless grief? No, perish the hated, guilty thought, and when with such base ingratitude she can repay your unbounded, confiding affection, may heaven's curses—"

"Phoebe—dear Phoebe," interrupted the agitated Selborne, "for mercy's sake forbear."

"Ah," exclaimed the bewildered girl, starting, "what voice was that? Where am I? Where are my parents? Lord Selborne here, and I alone in his company; the dreadful truth flashes upon my recollection. Oh, wretched, misguided, lost cruel girl."

She covered her face with her hands, and for the time convulsive sobs choked her further utterance.

"Dearest Phoebe," said Lord Selborne, "oh, why give way to this violent paroxysm of grief. Pray be calm."

"Calm, calm," she wildly repeated, "oh, can I now that I have awakened from my guilty dream, be calm, or view my conduct with any other feelings than those of disgust and abhorrence? What fatal spell could have taken possession of my senses to cause me to act thus? Oh, whither are you conveying me?"

"Fear not, my own sweet Phoebe," replied the libertine, "Lord Selborne would hate and despise himself could he deceive that fair being to whom his heart is so fondly so earnestly devoted. All that I have promised I will solemnly, faithfully perform. Doubt me not then, but look forward with bright and sanguine hope to future happiness. As quickly as possible on our arrival in London, whither we are now hastening, I will make you my lawful wife, till then I will hold your honour sacred, nor will I utter a word that can raise the blush of offended modesty on your cheek."

"To London?" cried our heroine, in tones of the greatest agitation and alarm; "oh, a nameless sensation of horror steals o'er me at the thought. Oh, my lord, how cruel was it of you thus to take advantage of the weakness of a poor, simple, unexperienced, and deluded girl. But it is not yet too late to repent, though there is not a moment to be lost. My lord, if the vows you have so often uttered to me are sincere, if indeed you truly love me, you will not hesitate to yield at once to my entreaties. Restore me to my peaceful home, my aged, grey-haired parents I implore you, and I will invoke heaven's choicest blessings on your head, and revere your memory. The poor humble hedger's daughter, must not, dare not, aspire to the hand of Lord Selborne."

"Oh, Phoebe," returned his lordship, "how much indeed do you wrong me by for a moment harbouring a thought derogatory to the integrity and honour of my intentions. I repeat, solemnly repeat, that sooner would I perish than deceive you. You have flattered my hopes by acknowledging a return of the pure and fervent love I bear you, and would you then now retract those vows you have so fondly uttered, and abandon me to misery and abject despair? Ah, no, I know your affectionate faithful heart too well to believe you capable of such conduct. Arouse yourself then from this state of doubt and misgiving, and place every confidence in the truth, the virtue, and sincerity of my motives. But a short time, probably only a few days, will witness the realisation of my promises, the consummation of my dearest wishes; and then with what feelings of joy

and pride will I restore you to those beloved parents who cannot for a moment doubt their daughter's virtue."

Alas, for the hapless Phoebe, the libertine's wily arts succeeded too well; his image was too deeply enshrined in her heart to suffer her to reject his suit, or to turn a deaf ear to his honeyed words.

"Oh, Selborne, dear Selborne," she exclaimed, with a burst of the most powerful emotion, "I cannot, dare not, will not doubt you. Forgive my temporary indecision and misgiving, I implore you. Your noble heart can never contemplate the betrayal, the ruin of a poor confiding girl, who lives but in the blessed assurance of your love, and who is thus prepared to run every risk, to make every sacrifice for your dear sake. Selborne, beloved Selborne, again and for ever I am yours."

She threw herself sobbing on his bosom, and once more the libertine triumphed in his guilty designs.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ADVENTURE—THE GIPSIES—THE ROAD-SIDE INN.

The chaise was now proceeding along a romantic lane, overshadowed by the umbrageous branches of tall trees, which grew on either side, and Lord Selborne happening to look from the open window of the vehicle, saw lights at a distance, proceeding from several fires kindled at intervals, and which convinced him that they were approaching a gipsy encampment.

Knowing the boldness and insolence of these people, and also that at times, if a traveller refused to submit to their extortionate demands, they would not hesitate to use violence to enforce them, Lord Selborne felt somewhat uneasy, more especially for the alarm it would cause Phoebe; he therefore stopped the postilion, and inquired whether there were no means of avoiding them.

The postilion replied in the negative, but at the same time observed, that his lordship need be under no apprehensions, as "he knew very well how to deal with such 'warmint,' and would either pass them unmolested, or else drive over them, that was all about it."

Our heroine clung to Lord Selborne on hearing the observations of the man, and looked timidly in his face, and at that moment the voices of the gipsies were heard singing a wild chorus, and which had a curious and not uninteresting effect on the still night air.

They listened attentively, and as the vehicle approached nearer the spot where the

gipsy's were congregated, they could clearly distinguish the following words—

“Come hither, come hither, to the gipsies' haunt,
And meet in the motley throng;
Retire, retire, round the bright wood fire,
And join in the feast and song.
The sours are ive of the woody glade,
And the dark and silent dell;
In the lowly tent in the forest's shade,
We gipsy wanders dwell.
Come hither, &c.

Oh, a roving life is our's, my boys,
And a merry life to live;
No princes on earth are half so free,
We take when the rich won't give.
We wander afar, 'neath the son and star,
And at revels we jest and gibe;
Then merry are we, all jovially,
Pass the hours of the wandering tribe.
Come hither, &c.

The manner in which this rude and simple chorus was executed, was far from being unmusical, and Phoebe could not help listening to it with mingled feelings of fear and admiration.

Often had she fearlessly rambled among the gipsy tribe, when they happened to be encamped in the lanes and woodlands near her native village home, and listened with wondering delight to the marvellous predictions of some dark-eyed fortune-teller, and never had she, in any one instance, been insulted or molested by them, but there was something so different in the present circumstances, and her spirits were so depressed by the burthen of anxiety which weighed upon them, that she could not help being timid and apprehensive.

She looked out from the vehicle, and then had an uninterrupted view of the gipsies.

They were encamped along the further end of the lane, and before their tents might be seen their cheerful fires, at intervals, some of the women and girls being engaged in cooking their night's repast, and numerous rough-looking men, women, and children were grouped about in different directions, or lounging on the grass, variously occupied, some in smoking and drinking, others in playing at cards, draughts, dominoes, tossing, &c. Altogether they formed quite a theatrical tableau.

“Oh, my lord,” said our heroine, “cannot we avoid these people? I know not how it is, but on this occasion I dread to encounter them.”

“You have heard what Thomas, the postillion, has said, love,” answered Lord Selborne, “but do not fear, even should they feel disposed to do so, they will not be so daring as to venture to molest us.”

He was interrupted by a loud burst of coarse laughter, mingled with oaths and ribaldry from the gipsies—which made poor Phoebe shudder, and increased her fears and misgivings—and the next moment the chaise had arrived close upon them.

Thomas gave his whip a hasty crack, and endeavoured to urge the horses hurriedly past them, but several rude voices commanded him peremptorily to stop, and the horses' heads were seized to enforce the same.

Phoebe's alarm was now great, for it was evident that these were ruffians and vagabonds of the worst description, who did not stand upon trifles to obtain their insolent demands.

She again clung fearfully to Lord Selborne, and he placed his hand upon the pistols with which he had fortunately provided himself, in case there should be any reason for their services.

The next moment a tall, powerful fellow, with large black whiskers, remarkably bright and penetrating eyes, and forbidding expression of features, stalked up to the side of the vehicle, and rudely stared his lordship and his fair companion in the face.

He was quickly followed by an aged woman, shrivelled, bony, and extremely ugly, with small, fiery-like eyes, and fully realizing, in personal appearances, one of the witches in Macbeth. Several others of the tribe, men and women, gathered around, and peered boldly and curiously into the vehicle.

Phoebe shrank from their scrutiny, for she could not help thinking that they gazed upon her with mingled looks of hatred and scorn.

But no such feelings as those disturbed the breast of Lord Selborne, and he hastily and haughtily demanded why he was thus obstructed in his journey, and what they wanted.

“What,” returned the man, sternly and insolently, and at the same time fixing a sinister look upon his lordship, and the trembling Phoebe; “would you ride over us, and trample us in the dust, like varmin, sooner than pay the fair toll to the gipsy encampment?”

“Aye,” croaked forth the old woman, in a most discordant and disagreeable tone of voice;—“'tis even like the proud aristocrat,—the moneyed idler, the pauper upon the hard earnings of those he lords it over, and dares to call his inferiors. We pay no respect to such worthless gilded baubles, only to prey upon their purses, whenever they cross our path.”

“Insolent wretches,” exclaimed the indignant Lord Selborne;—“let me pass without any further delay, for my time is too precious to waste on such beings as you are. Are ye robbers, footpads, under the guise of gipsies.”

"Yes," replied the man, impudently, "if you will have it so, for when any one ventures to resist our demands, we never fail to enforce compliance. We are no mongrel curs, and we care no more for a lord than a lacquey."

"Villain!" cried the exasperated Lord Selborne, again laying his hands upon his pistols, though the gipsy did not see him;—"You shall not intimidate me;—I will not yield to your insolent and extortionate demands."

"But you must, you shall, Lord Selborne;" said the old woman fiercely, and fixing a mysterious and malicious look upon his lordship, and poor Phoebe, who tried to conceal herself from observation as much as possible.

Selborne started.

"Ah!" he exclaimed,—"known?"

"Aye," replied the old gipsy hag, "known to me as a consummate scoundrel, and he who seeks the destruction of the poor deluded girl by his side; Phoebe Mayfield, the too confiding, simple village maiden."

Our heroine heard no more; but uttering a cry of anguish and horror she fainted in the arms of Lord Selborne.

Confused, abashed, surprised,—Lord Selborne stared at the gipsies aghast, while their repulsive features glared with savage exultation, as they pointed significantly to the fair inanimate being he held in his arms.

"What feeling of deadly malice towards one who could never have injured you by word or deed, could have induced you to say, to do this?" Selborne demanded.

"The gipsy will ever resent an unmerited insult," answered the man in a stern and threatening tone;—"aye, come that insult either from peer or peasant. You have treated us with haughty arrogance and contumely, my Lord Selborne;—dared to call us villains, wretches, vagabonds, and beware, lest we unkennel our bloodhounds and set them on their prey."

"I would crave your pardon," said Lord Selborne, alarmed at the gipsy's words, and menacing looks;—"if in the excitement of the moment, I uttered that which was unbecoming."

"So," said the old woman, with a look of bitter scorn and sarcasm;—"the proud and haughty Lord Selborne can condescend to apologize, when fear assails him. Look to the fair young creature you have lured from her happy rustic home, and when you exult o'er the destruction of her virtue, recollect that your triumph has been accomplished at the price of her aged mother's broken heart!"

"No, no, no, recall those words, I do beseech you;" said Lord Selborne with much emotion;—"tis but idle talk to torture and alarm me. This is a considerable distance

from where the parents of my willing companion resides, and how is it possible then that you can have become acquainted with the particulars you have stated."

"Seek not to penetrate the mysterious power of the gipsy sybil, Lord Selborne," replied the old woman;—"but rest assured that she has spoken the truth. Poor old Dame Mayfield died of a broken heart this evening, on receiving the fatal news of her daughter's cruel elopement. The sudden shock was too much for her. Thus has the first storm-cloud gathered and burst, and it will soon be succeeded by the raging tempest in all its fury. Beware!—beware!"

Lord Selborne was completely horror-struck, and continued to gaze at the old woman and her companions aghast, who remained fixed in the same attitude of scorn and defiance.

"I will not believe it;" at length exclaimed Selborne;—"it cannot be;—'tis impossible;—'tis a base fabrication, to deceive and torture me. Here is money for ye;"—he added, throwing a purse to the man;—"it is that which ye seek, I imagine. Detain me no longer; let me begone."

The gipsies laughed exultingly and derisively;—the horses heads were released;—the men and women slowly retired towards their tents,—the postillion again gave his whip a hearty crack, and the chaise once more rolled on its way, and, emerging from the lane,—the gipsies were lost sight of, much to the relief of Lord Selborne.

The observations of the old woman had made a deep impression on him, and filled his mind with various doubts and apprehensions; and the words she had spoken to Phoebe (who still remained insensible), stung him with shame and remorse, and he therefore, almost dreaded her recovery.

How true were the assertions of the old gipsy sybil, and he was completely lost in wonder and bewilderment to imagine by what means she had been enabled so truly to penetrate his secret thoughts and designs.

But could he, now he was reminded of the truth, and awakened to a full sense of the perfidy and enormity of his intentions, persist in the execution of his guilty plans?—Could he gaze upon the pale and beautiful countenance of that innocent girl, and still contemplate her ruin?—The thought was monstrous, and he shuddered at his own villany.

Even now it was not too late to repent, and abandon his guilty projects. While Phoebe still remained in a state of insensibility, he could give the order to the postillion to return, and—

"But no, no," he suddenly exclaimed, "I cannot form the resolution now to abandon

the triumph, it has cost me such time, and care, and ingenuity to accomplish. And why should I suffer the words of this mad-brained old woman to alarm me, and move me from my purpose?—I will be firm;—but hush, she revives.—Dear Phoebe!"

"Ah!—Selborne," said the poor girl, looking affectionately upon him;—"You—you are here then?—I have had a frightful dream, which represented you to me as false and treacherous, and that it is the destruction of the innocence of the poor girl you have taught to love you, you alone contemplate. Oh, I can never believe my Selborne so base, so cruel, so wicked.—Ah!" she suddenly added, as a fearful thought flashed across her brain;—"release me from your embrace;—I dare not, will not meet your unhallowed touch, while the awful words of that fearful old woman are still ringing in mine ears."

"Oh, Phoebe," said the libertine, "surely you have more strength of mind than to suffer the words of that bold impostor to make any impression on it to my prejudice?—Come, come, my dear girl, I pray you banish it from your memory, for it is unworthy of a serious thought. It was the extortion of money the gipsy vagrants alone sought. I thought it as well to yield compliance with their bold and insolent demands, and they no longer offered any obstruction to us; and we are now far away from them. Pray then endeavour to compose yourself, and depend upon it all that I have promised, I will truly, faithfully perform."

"Oh, Selborne;" ejaculated the maiden, looking tenderly and imploringly in his face;—"may I indeed trust you?—You will not, say you will not deceive me."

"By all my hopes, never!" he emphatically replied.

"Bless you, bless you, dear Selborne, for that assurance;—then I will banish all future fears from my breast, and endeavour to be happy;"—exclaimed Phoebe, and sinking fondly in his arms.

He affectionately kissed her lips, and looked encouragingly in her face; and her spirits seemed gradually to revive.

"Do you intend to proceed much further on the journey to night, dear Selborne?"—She at length anxiously interrogated. "I feel weary, and to require rest."

"We cannot I know, be far from a respectable roadside inn, with the accommodation of which, I am perfectly familiar;" he returned, "and there we will put up for the night.—Ah!" he added, looking from the vehicle; "yonder glimmering lights must surely proceed from it. Thomas," he inquired of the postillion;—"are we not approaching the old 'Royal George'?"

"We are not many yards from it, your

lordship," replied Thomas;—"do we stop there to-night?"

His master replied in the affirmative, and Thomas smacking his whip, shortly drew up at the old roadside inn in question.

CHAPTER XV.

HESITATION—THE FATAL DECISION.

The aspect of this old hostelry, (which had been a place for the reception and accommodation of travellers, almost from time immemorial), was indeed most inviting. The red glare of the cheerful fire might be seen reflected in the large bow-fronted window, and that, in spite of the season, seemed to smile a hearty welcome to all who approached. Then, as to the external appearance of the building, it was quaint and venerable, with two large trees overshadowing it,—a horse trough before it,—and a sign-board above the door-way, with a painting of what was intended to be a portrait of his most Gracious Majesty, King George the Third, with a very stupid expression of countenance, which was not at all improved by an ugly three cornered cocked hat, wig, and pigtail.

The sound of the postillion's whip, and the noise of the carriage-wheels, as it approached, brought the worthy host, (one of the most jovial looking of all hosts), and several members of his establishment to the inn door;—and the rubicund visage of the landlord seemed to glow again, when he saw that Lord Selborne was his intended guest, (for he knew him well, and had on many occasions experienced his liberality).

He eyed our heroine with no small degree of curiosity, as his lordship handed her from the chaise, bowing at the same time most obsequiously, and she shrank back with bashful timidity, and, averting her face from vulgar scrutiny, suffered Lord Selborne to conduct her into a private parlour of the inn, though her heart again misgave her as she did so, and fears and suspicions crossed her mind.

The room had a most comfortable appearance, and the quiet and respectability of all around her, as well as the encouraging looks of Lord Selborne, at length inspired her with more confidence.

"I am very glad to see you, my lord;" observed the host, again bowing very low; "I'm sure your lordship does me great honour by visiting the old King George; but it was ever the same in your late noble father's time, in whose service I lived for many years, and—"

"That will do, Robinson," interrupted

Lord Selborne, smiling at the old man's garrulity, "my fair cousin here, Miss Everard, whom I am conveying to her friends in London, is fatigued with her journey, so, after some refreshment, I will get your worthy dame to escort her to the best chamber in your house."

Phoebe blushed at this fabrication, and the perfect ease and coolness with which his lordship gave utterance to it; but she could not but acknowledge the necessity for it, although her simple rustic dress was not so much in keeping with the character of the tale.

She, however, felt somewhat more at ease. "My wife shall attend to the young lady without delay, your lordship," said the landlord, in the same tone of studied politeness, "and I trust that her ladyship will have no cause to complain of the accommodation."

He then retired from the room, and left our heroine and his lordship to themselves.

"Dearest Phoebe," said Lord Selborne, "you will not, I know, think anything of the little subterfuges I am compelled to resort to, in order to satisfy the curiosity, and quiet the suspicions of these people. You must, I think, see the necessity of it, to-night you may rest securely here; at an early hour to-morrow morning, refreshed, we shall resume our journey, and on our arrival in London, you will find everything prepared for your reception, and my whole study shall be to make you comfortable, and to contribute to your happiness."

The eyes of the poor girl brightened, and fresh hope inspired her breast at the apparent truth and sincerity of his manner, and in a voice of affection, she said—

"Oh, my lord, I cannot, will not doubt you. Your words re-assure me, and I will in future endeavour to be calm, patient, and confident, and to trust to providence for the result."

"Spoken like my own dear Phoebe," exclaimed his lordship, passionately embracing her, "and believe me that it shall be no fault of mine if all the hopes you may fondly cherish in your breast be not realised."

He was prevented from saying more by the re-appearance of the landlord, accompanied by his wife, a comely, decent-looking old dame, who courtseyed very subserviently to our heroine and his lordship.

They brought with them the repast, which they spread upon the table, and then at a motion from Lord Selborne, quitted the room.

Phoebe partook but sparingly of the meal, and then, feeling weary and exhausted from the fatigue of the journey, and the unusual care, excitement, and anxiety she had undergone, she requested permission to retire for

the night, to which Lord Selborne readily assented, and having affectionately embraced her, and repeated his vows of constancy, he immediately rang the bell, and the hostess attended by a female servant re-entered the room.

By them, after tenderly bidding Lord Selborne good night, Phoebe was conducted to a commodious and comfortable chamber at the top of the house, and there thanking them for their kindness, but wishing to be alone, she dismissed them as quick as possible.

When they were gone, Phoebe first examined the chamber minutely, and secured the door to prevent the possibility of intrusion, and then sinking on her knees, implored the forgiveness of heaven if she were acting wrong, invoked fervent blessings on the heads of her aged parents, and most humbly but earnestly supplicated the care and protection of Omnipotence throughout her future career. She then slowly arose, and throwing herself in a chair, for a short time abandoned herself to serious reflection.

Her thoughts first naturally wandered to home and her venerable and beloved parents, she pictured to herself their surprise, their grief, their suspicions, their agony and despair, on discovering her elopement, and again the most terrible apprehensions besieged her mind, and she shrunk appalled at the contemplation of the dangerous and desperate course she had adopted.

Harry Ashford, too, the fond and faithful Harry, who from his boyhood's days had seemed to live only in her presence, and whose every thought, whose constant study had been to contribute to her happiness, and to render himself worthy of that love she had acknowledged for him; oh, what must be his misery, his bitter, his poignant anguish on discovering her faithlessness, and the total destruction of those bright hopes she had herself encouraged him to indulge in? She trembled at the thought, and blushed with shame and remorse at the deceptive part she had acted.

While these reflections still tortured the poor girl's brain, the fearful words and conduct of the gipsy sybil recurred to her memory, and racked and bewildered her mind still more.

She became completely lost and bewildered by the variety of conflicting thoughts that crowded in such rapid succession upon her brain, and knew not what to do, how to act for the best. Should she fly the threatened danger ere it was too late, and endeavour to retrace her footsteps to her village home. While the inmates of the inn were wrapped in sleep, she might be able to effect her escape without detection.



But how was it possible that in her present exhausted state, in the darkness of the night and in a strange part of the country, she would be able to accomplish such a task?

The thought seemed to be little short of madness. Besides would not her parents look upon her with doubt and suspicion; believe her lost, fallen, and degraded, and refuse to receive her? They would, they must, and she shrunk from the task with a feeling of abhorrence and horror.

And could she abandon Lord Selborne after all the solemn vows he had uttered to her, the fond promises he had frequently made and which she had reciprocated? Surely it would be unjust, it would be cruel to do so, and her heart revolted at the idea.

"No," she said, "I will no longer hesitate,

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I will not doubt the truth, the fervour of Selborne's love. What cause has he given me to question the honour and integrity of his intentions? None, whatever; and I must be weak, unjust, and ungenerous to do so. Thus far have I proceeded, Heaven knows the purity of my thoughts and motives, and let whatever may be the results, I will not now retract."

Fresh courage and determination animated her breast as she thus reflected, and again having offered up a prayer to heaven for protection, she turned her thoughts to bed.

Listening, she heard footsteps at intervals ascending the different staircases of the old inn, followed by the opening and closing of doors, then all was silent, which convinced her that the inmates had retired to rest, and

undressing herself therefore, she also sought her couch.

Notwithstanding her fatigue, for the first time in her life, being so far away from home, in a strange place, under such peculiar circumstances, and with the busy thoughts that still crowded upon her brain, it was some time ere she could compose her mind to rest, and she lay tossing about on her pillow, in a state of great agitation.

At length nature was completely exhausted, and sleep descended upon her eyelids. But it was not that calm and refreshing sleep of which she stood so much in need, but disturbed by troublesome dreams, which presented scenes of the most wild and torturing description to her imagination, and she frequently started and awoke in horror and confusion.

And thus passed the dreary and tedious hours till daylight, when, tired of the couch, Phoebe arose, and having dressed herself, took her seat by the window, for, in consequence of the earliness of the hour, there was no one in the inn yet stirring.

It was a fine, clear, cheerful morning, and she threw up the window in order to inhale the early refreshing breeze, and to listen to the melody of the birds who were carolling forth their joyous notes from every branch and spray.

Again she thought of her rustic home, and the sorrowing hearts it now too probably contained, and once more regret that she had been induced to quit it, filled her breast.

The form of poor Henry Ashford too arose to her imagination, and she almost fancied she could hear the bitter reproaches, nay, perhaps the curses that, in the frenzy of his anguish and despair, he was heaping upon her head.

Again her resolution failed her, and she wavered and hesitated.

She was interrupted in the midst of her meditations by a gentle tap at her chamber-door, and, opening it, the female servant of the inn entered.

She came to inform her that the morning repast previous to the re-commencement of the journey was ready, and that Lord Selborne awaited her presence. With a faltering sadness of heart, and a hesitating step, Phoebe descended the stairs that conducted to the parlour of the inn where her and Lord Selborne had sat the night before, and as she did so the same dark suspicions that had before haunted her mind, and which had been strengthened by the predictions of the gipsy sybil, flashed across her brain, and took a powerful possession of her senses. However, she endeavoured to stifle her feelings as much as possible, and entered the room with a firm step.

Lord Selborne hastened to meet her with a glad heart and a smiling countenance. He was already equipped for the resumption of the journey, and Thomas, the postillion was waiting with the chaise at the door.

"Dear Phoebe," said his lordship, in tones of affection, and encircling her slender waist with his arm, "with what fond feelings of transport do I meet you again even after the brief interval that I have been separated from your society. Heaven grant that you are refreshed after your night's rest, and that your dreams have been those of love and happiness. But how is this? You are pale and tremble, and even now the crystal tear drops glisten in your eyes. Tell me, I beseech you, my love, what causes this emotion."

Phoebe hesitated, and struggled with her feelings for a moment or two, but at length unable to restrain them any longer, she burst into tears, and sinking on her knees before Lord Selborne, in a voice almost inarticulate from emotion, she ejaculated:—

"Oh, my lord, in spite of all my efforts to persuade myself to the contrary, I feel that I am loitering on the very brink of a fearful precipice, and that my destruction will inevitably follow, if I do not immediately fly from it; your intentions may be just, may be honourable, I would fain believe them so, yet dreadful forebodings will steal across my mind, which I cannot rid myself of. I feel that I have already acted wrong, very wrong, and would redeem my character ere it be too late. If you sincerely love me, Selbourne, you will present no obstacle to my wishes. Oh, restore me, I beseech you to my home, my friends, my distracted parents; and, if you deem me still worthy of your love, prefer your suit as prudence dictates, as honour sanctions, and so as the ready voice of scandal shall dare not to utter a word in disparagement of it."

Lord Selbourne felt confused and abashed by the extreme energy and earnestness of her manner, and, for a few moments was at a loss how to reply to her. At the same time his conscience smote him, at the thought of the villainous perfidious part he was enacting toward one so truly good and virtuous; and who, though humble was her origin and station in life, would have done honour and shed a lustre on the most exalted rank. He hesitated any longer to deceive her, and one moment he was half inclined to confess his guilty designs, implore her forgiveness, restore her to her home, and all that was most dear to her, and then relieve her from the contamination of his presence for ever.

With feelings of torturing anxiety which may he readily conceived, poor Phoebe watched narrowly the expression of Selborne's

countenance, during this brief interval, endeavouring with her keen eye, and quick conception to read his thoughts; and varied were the emotions, the hopes and fears, the doubts and misgivings that agitated her breast.

She still continued in the same attitude, on her knees, and her looks were sufficient to move the most callous and insensible heart to pity and compassion.

"You are silent, my lord," she said, at length; "you seem to hesitate to answer me, and your features express some secret and powerful emotion, which I may seek in vain to fathom. Oh, what can this mean? Surely you have not deceived me; you cannot have been so cruel as to trifle with a poor simple and inexperienced girl's feelings, and to seek the destruction of her fame, her happiness! No, no, no, I cannot, dare not, will not believe you so base and unprincipled. Tell me, convince me, I supplicate you, my lord, that my suspicions are unfounded, and drive me not by the knowledge of your hypocrisy and perfidy to madness and despair.

The libertine recollected himself; he saw that the temporary remorse of his feelings, was likely to betray him, and to frustrate all his deep laid schemes, and he therefore resolved to exert himself to the utmost to destroy the dangerous impression that had taken a hold of Phoebe's mind, and to banish all further scruples, or compunctious feelings from his own breast.

"My beloved Phoebe," he said, raising her gently and affectionately from her humble suppliant posture; "what strange wild phantasies are these you have suffered to take possession of you? Indeed they are most fallacious and unfounded. Banish all such torturing and erroneous ideas from your mind, and be firm, be firm. Wealth, rank, happiness, all are within your grasp, and will you then suffer any false notions to induce you to reject them? Come, come, my dearest girl, this weakness is really unworthy of you; arouse yourself, I pray you, depend on me, and rest assured that I would sooner perish than deceive you; or be guilty of a single act that could cause you the slightest pang of sorrow or regret. Rest your mind contented regarding your parents; I will communicate with them immediately on our arrival in London, and a few weeks only at the farthest they will be restored to you, no more to part, but to enjoy all the happiness that wealth can purchase."

These observations throughout, were made in such an apparent tone of fervour and sincerity, that they had all the effect upon the innocent Phoebe, Selborne desired them to have. Again every suspicion was banished

from her breast, and she blamed and reproached herself for having for a moment encouraged them. The idea of raising her poor old parents from poverty, to affluence, and to some comfort and happiness for the remainder of their days, was more than sufficient to destroy every scruple, and joy and hope again animated her features.

"'Tis done, dearest Selborne," she exclaimed, sinking on his bosom; "pardon me for what I said, your last observations, and blessed assurances have at length finally decided me, and henceforth, you shall never find me hesitate. I will be guided by you in everything. Selborne, beloved Selborne, from this hour, this moment I am yours, your's alone, and for ever!"

The libertine pressed her to his bosom, and need we attempt to describe his feelings of triumph and satisfaction?

The breakfast which had been prepared for them previous to their departure was quickly despatched, and Lord Selborne having handed his beauteous companion into the vehicle, they resumed their journey, Phoebe being made confident, and in much better spirits than she had before experienced since her departure from her native village.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ARRIVAL IN LONDON.

It is quite unnecessary to pursue our travellers throughout the whole of the journey; as nothing more particular than that which we have already related, occurred to them. It may, however be as well to state that Lord Selborne at present paid the utmost respect to the person of his intended victim, and never said word that could raise the blush of offended modesty upon her cheek.

As his lordship was in no hurry to reach London, and he was anxious that Phoebe should not suffer from over-fatigue, they travelled by easy stages, so that their journey occupied more than a week; and, delighted by the beautiful scenery they travelled through, and the interesting conversation of Lord Selborne as he pointed out to her notice any particular building they might pass, and entered into a vivid and graphic history of it, Phoebe became perfectly happy and content, and looked forward to the future with feelings of joyous anticipation and confidence.

His lordship had informed her that on their arrival in town it was his intention to take her to his mansion in St. James's Square, and that he had written to the Honourable Mrs. Emily Wildboore, (a hand-

some young widow, his cousin, who since the death of her husband, who while living, he had highly esteemed, had resided with him to superintend his household), to be prepared to receive her.

At the mention of this lady, a strange and unpleasant feeling entered the breast of our heroine, but she checked it, and expressed to Lord Selborne the pleasure she should feel in having the honour to be introduced to a lady of the amiable character which he represented the widow to be.

Such too, were the glowing descriptions which Lord Selborne gave of the Great Metropolis, that Phoebe was completely fascinated, and awaited with impatience to enter into those scenes of gaiety, and novelty, and in which she fondly anticipated to experience so much pleasure and enjoyment, from the captivating colours in which they were painted to her imagination by the eloquent tongue of Lord Selborne.

At length the chaise drew near that busy scene, whose wonders had occupied the mind of our heroine entirely for the last few days. Already she imagined she heard the noise and din, and saw the continual bustly and confusion which her lover had so ably described to her. Then she imagined the splendid equipages, the noble streets and squares; the costly fitted up shops, the magnificent mansions, the delightful walks, the spacious parks, (for his lordship had taken especial care not to depicture the squalid poverty and misery, herded in dirty, narrow, confined streets, and wretched courts and alleys which, at that time in particular, formed so large a portion of the metropolis of London), and her brain turned giddy at the various strange thoughts that crowded upon it.

Lord Selborne did not offer to check her emotions, but on the contrary, rather encouraged them, for he knew well that they were calculated to promote his wishes and designs; and this dream of delusion, this happy state of sanguine expectation, our heroine continued until the vehicle approached the very streets of London, and at length it burst upon her view with startling effect.

It was night, and the streets of London were brilliantly illuminated to celebrate some remarkable event which had recently taken place. All gave token of the great joy and festivity that prevailed, and more than realised the vivid picture which Selborne had drawn of it.

The glare of light, the distant hum of voices from the vast crowds of persons that thronged the streets, mingled with the noise of the different vehicles lumbering to and fro, quite bewildered the senses of poor

Phoebe, and she knew not in what terms sufficiently to express her astonishment and pleasure to Lord Selborne at all she saw.

As the vehicle proceeded on its way, and she had a more extensive view of the animated scene, the wonder and admiration of Phoebe increased, and she looked from the carriage window upon all that was passing around with anxious delight.

It was a general illumination, and every house had its display, more or less, from the humble candles, in candlesticks, moulded out of little square lumps of clay, by industrious and indefatigable ragged urchins, to the full blaze of splendour emitted from variegated lamps, in all kinds of fancy devices, and striking painted transparencies, in glowing colours, and with suitable mottoes.

Gay flags and streamers were also waving in the air, here and there, and laurels branches, and beautiful flowers, tastefully arranged, met the eyes at every turn.

Bands of itinerant musicians might be heard in almost every street, and the rude chorus of half-drunken revellers, staggering from the different taverns, and the curious observations, and many peals of laughter that proceeded from the crowd, added to the general festivity and hilarity of the scene.

Phoebe had never witnessed anything of the kind before, and therefore her amazement and amusement was by no means to be marvelled at. To her it had all the appearance of romance, and for the time every other thought was stifled in her breast.

"And is this indeed that wonderful London that I have so often read of?" she ejaculated, turning to Lord Selborne; "Oh, surely if this is its general aspect, sorrow or misery must be perfectly unknown to its fortunate inhabitants."

"I should be sorry to destroy the pleasing impression which your *entre* into London has made upon your mind, my dear Phoebe," replied his lordship; "but this is *not* always the aspect of the gay metropolis. All is not gold that glitters, as the adage has it, and it is fully illustrated in London. Amidst all this blaze of splendour, this din of mirth and festivity, even amongst those whose faces wear the brightest smiles, and who seem to enter into the life and spirit of the scene with more than common alacrity, doubtless there are many sorrowful hearts, from gripping poverty and want; many aching heads from constant care and anxiety in the fruitless endeavour to obtain scarcely a bare existence. London, my beloved Phoebe, is one vast city of anomalies and contradictions, and many in seeking to solve the problem why it is so, meet their own ruin as the result of their labours."

Our heroine expressed her astonishmen

at the rather disparaging explanation which his lordship had given, and sighed to think that so fair and joyous a scene should be marred in effect, and suddenly by such black and painful facts as those that Selborne had described.

Lord Selborne ordered the postillion to proceed slowly, to enable Phoebe the better to gratify her curiosity, and she soon again became lost in wonder and admiration which was strengthened at every turn.

At length the vehicle reached the neighbourhood of Bond Street and Piccadilly, and there the splendour of the illumination, and the magnificent display from every house, nobleman's mansion, and public building completely dazzled the eyes, and bewildered the senses of the simple country girl.

St. James's Street, and the different club-houses there, with their gorgeous decorations and emblematical devices, formed a perfect scene of fairy land, and Phoebe could never have been tired in gazing at it.

But on entering St. James's Square the scene beggared all description, and, when Lord Selborne informed his wondering and bewildered companion that their journey was at an end, she sunk on his bosom, overpowered by her emotions, and it was some minutes ere she could sufficiently recover herself to speak a word.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TOWN MANSION—THE RECEPTION.

It is many years since there have been witnessed such scenes in London as the one we have been faintly describing—they have passed away with "the good old times," and modern sights or public festivals, in comparison with them, have neither the intrinsic merit, nor the extrinsic effect of theatrical spectacles.

"The light of other days is not only faded as regards them, but they are shorn of all their former attractions entirely, and present a miserable attempt at something, neither artistic intelligible, or ingenious. Foreigners laugh at the clumsy, dull, insipid, stupid, worthless affairs, and the general public stare their hour or two away at them, rush in disgust to the different public houses to console themselves for the imposition and the disappointment, and stagger home to bed, vexed to think that they have wasted so much of their time, and witnessed so wretched an apology for the reckless squandering of the public money.

Those of our readers who may be old enough to recollect the public sights and fes-

tivals of thirty or forty years ago—and which cost far less money than the modern miserable puppet-shows, under that name—must we think be fain to admit that our remarks are correct, and that under the lying pretext of economy—for it is no such thing—we have sadly retrograded in what was formerly one of "merry England's" most favourite characteristics, kept loyalty and patriotism ever uppermost in the breasts of the people, and went hand in hand with more, much more than the philanthropy of the present day. Verily England has become a dull, plodding, como n-place nation as regards some of the mainsprings of its vitality. But to our tale.

The chaise in which were our heroine and Lord Selborne, drew up before the door of a stately and elegant mansion in the square, which was illuminated from the basement storey to the parapet, and when his lordship informed Phoebe that this was Selborne House, and was to be her future town residence, the poor humble village girl was quite overwhelmed with the idea of so much gradeur, a sensation of fear and trembling came over her, and she shrunk back unable to mutter a word.

Lord Selborne kissed her affectionately, and endeavoured to encourage her with one of his most gracious smiles. He then drew the long white veil (which had been supplied to her at the inn where they had first stopped) over her features, and Thomas having thundered a rat-tat-tat at the door, which might have aroused the dead, and rung the "servant's bell" with a truly alarming energy, an immense fat porter in splendid livery, and in a powdered wig of the full blown aristocratic quality, quickly appeared, backed up by two or three other livery servants, of vast importance in appearance, and who deigned to honour his lordship with their valuable services, on the mere nominal consideration of board and lodging, a moderate income, and that quantity of ease and indolence that gentlemen of their high position in society very naturally require.

The curiosity of the mob in the square, to see a genuine live lord, was greatly excited, and they flocked around the carriage to catch a glimpse of him as he stepped from it, not for a moment dreaming of the extra treat that was in store for them.

A sickly faintness came over poor Phoebe at all these ostentatious displays, and she was so agitated, confused, and bewildered, that she was almost unconscious where she was, or what she was doing.

His lordship took her hand, and assisted her to alight from the chaise, at the same time whispering a word of encouragement in her ear. There was a great sensation among

the gaping crowd, and much excitement and curiosity depicted in the rubicund visage of the fat porter, and the sleek-calved liveried functionaries at his elbow, and Lord Selborne having gallantly handed the young rustic beauty into the hall, the door was closed with a bang, and a shout of applause burst from the crowd outside, to be equalled only by the "gods" on the successful representation of some blood thirsty and inhuman melo-drama.

Lord Selborne was about to hand our heroine up the grand staircase, which was brilliantly lighted by costly chandeliers when overcome by the violent agitation of her feelings, at the extraordinary and never dreamed of situation in which she found herself, Phoebe arrested him in his purpose, and, whispering in his ear, said—

"For mercy's sake spare my feelings, my Lord, and give me time to recover myself. All this pomp and grandeur completely stupefies and bewilders my brain, and I feel as though I could sink into the earth. Oh, I was never born to move among such scenes of fashionable splendour as this, and my heart seems to shrink from the dazzle of its display. Have some consideration for the poor unassuming, humble rustic girl, Selborne. Do not introduce me to strangers till I have had time to compose and collect myself, and suffer me to retire to some more humble apartment for that purpose.

"You are a silly, bashful little creature, my sweet Phoebe," he replied, "and must endeavour to get rid of this timidity, and to feel yourself at home in this mansion, where you are to reign as its future honoured mistress. However, I will comply with your request; my fair cousin must postpone the pleasure, she no doubt has been promising herself of an introduction to you, for a short time; and I will make the necessary apology to her. Come, my love, then, this way."

Phoebe thanked him by her looks and felt greatly relieved. He then took her hand, and turning to the right, conducted her into a small but elegant apartment, prepared in every way for the reception of guests previous to their final introductions to their noble host and his friends.

Here our heroine sunk on a sofa on one side of the room, and Selborne seated himself near her.

The room, as we have before said, was an elegant one, and fitted up and furnished with much taste coupled with splendour. The windows were lofty, descending to the floor with pink curtains, and rich damask drapery depending from the ceiling, and ornamented with deep gold fringe, and gracefully formed festoons of the same.

Every article of furniture in this apart-

ment corresponded with the above. A valuable carpet, of the richest texture and choicest pattern, covered the floor, the walls were decorated with numerous fine paintings by old and modern masters, there were several beautiful specimens of sculpture in niches and marble vases standing on pedestals of the same, and containing some of the rarest exotics.

It was impossible that Phoebe could gaze upon all that was of the most *recherche* description, without wonder and admiration, nor could she resist the temptation of expressing the same to his lordship, who was highly gratified at her approbation, and applauded her taste and judgment.

"But oh, my lord," exclaimed the maiden, after a pause, "this place where all breathes the air of luxury, and splendour reigns in ostentatious exuberance, is no place for that poor girl whose dwelling has hitherto been the humble cottage—the only scenes among which she has been accustomed to ramble, those of nature's rural simplicity and beauty—her companions, nature's children, rude, unpolished, but still good and virtuous, and honest, and therefore not to be despised. Oh, Selborne, how can I ever be really happy, estranged from all, from everything that is in unison with my tastes, my feelings, and my wishes, and mingling in scenes and society so far above me, and in which I must ever appear as a presumptuous intruder?"

"Say not so, my love," he replied, "the future wife of Lord Selborne must ever command respect and homage, independent of the honour and reverence due to her own intrinsic merits, and who—who shall dare to deny them. But I pray you dismiss such thoughts, Phoebe, and try to reconcile yourself to the strange change of circumstances in which it has pleased providence to place you. For a short time I must leave you here, while I hasten to my cousin, who will be surprised at my delay in seeing her, and not introducing you to her. Endeavour to tranquillise your feelings during my absence which will only be for a short time."

Phoebe thanked him for his kind consideration, and he quitted the room, leaving her to her own reflections.

For some minutes after he was gone, her mind felt in such a strange state of excitement, confusion, and bewilderment, by all the singular events that had so rapidly taken place, that she could not collect her thoughts or arrange them in anything like order; and all that had happened had more the appearance of a dream than anything else. The splendour of all around her, dazzled and surprised her, and by far surpassed all that her most glowing imagination had ever depicted.

And Selborne, too, surely he could not

thus have openly brought her to this, his princely mansion, and propose to introduce her to one of his nearest relatives, as his future wife, without his intentions were strictly honourable? No, his behaviour had hitherto been marked by the greatest propriety, and apparent candour and sincerity, and she considered that it would be both ungenerous and unjust of her any longer to doubt him.

She felt the uneasiness and anxiety of her mind much relieved as these reflections occurred to it, and she endeavoured to put her trust in the goodness of the supreme, and to await patiently and with resignation, the result.

She walked to one of the windows, which commanded a view of some of the adjacent streets, and gazed with increased interest upon the gay and novel scene, which had abated none of its attractions, and shone forth with undiminished brilliancy.

The spectators seemed to have attained their highest tone of hilarity, and gladsome shouts, patriotic songs, and merry laughter prevailed, interspersed with strains of music from the different mansions of the gentry and nobility where parties were assembled on the joyous occasion; and the musical efforts of the more humble professors who mingled with the crowd, in the hope to reap a plentiful harvest of coppers for the notes they so liberally put into circulation.

Then there was the heavy tramp of numerous feet, the confused hum of voices, and the occasional shrieks of the females as they were rather roughly and unceremoniously hustled and jostled about among the vast moving multitude, that thronged the streets in every direction to "have a look at the illuminations."

In fact, there was everything to keep the attention arrested and the mind amused.

The sound of footsteps, however, descending the stairs, interrupted our heroine in her observations, a gentle tap at the room door quickly followed, and Lord Selborne re-entered.

"I hope you have not considered me unnecessarily long in my absence, dear Phoebe," he said, "but I have had a long explanation to give and an apology to make to my fair cousin. She is greatly disappointed at not having the pleasure of being introduced to you immediately on your arrival in London, but she is willing to make every allowance for your timidity under the circumstances, and your reluctance to be introduced to strangers, and, as she herself feels rather indisposed this evening, and considers you must require early rest, after the fatigue of your journey, she will, with your permission postpone the interview till the morning."

"The lady is most condescending, and considerate," said Phoebe, graciously; "you know my feelings, dear Selborne, and must be satisfied that it is not the want of proper respect for your cousin, or any affected bashfulness that prompts my conduct. I fully appreciate her kindness, and hope to heaven that I may be able to prove myself worthy of her good opinion and friendship."

"Which you are sure to do, my own sweet Phoebe," returned his lordship; "but come, you need refreshment, after which I will no longer detain you in conversation, for your heavy eyes, and pale languid countenance plainly tell me that you require rest."

Phoebe thanked him, and his lordship then rung the bell, and a servant answering the summons, he ordered refreshments, which were shortly brought, and Phoebe having partaken of them, after some short conversation, Lord Selborne embraced her affectionately, and bidding her good night, left her, informing her that whenever she felt inclined to retire to the chamber prepared for her, on ringing the bell, a servant would attend to conduct her to it.

When his lordship had retired, our heroine knelt down, and devoutly returned her thanks to the Almighty for having preserved her from all danger so far, and humbly but earnestly prayed for his protection for the future. She also solemnly besought His merciful care for her aged parents, and invoked every blessing on their heads.

She arose from her knees more tranquil than she had been for some hours, and feeling sleepy and fatigued, she rang the bell, and a young girl, about her own age, and of prepossessing appearance, quickly entered the room, and curtsied politely to our heroine and then respectfully awaited her pleasure.

Phoebe was pleased with the modest and respectful demeanour of this girl, especially as she did not eye her with that idle curiosity she had a right to expect she would, and having expressed to her a wish to retire for the night, the girl desired her to follow her.

Phoebe complied, and was conducted up two or three flights of stairs at the back of the house, till the girl arrived at a certain door, which she opened, and ushered our heroine into a chamber, possessing the same tasteful and elegant characteristics as the room which she had just quitted, combined with every comfort that could reasonably be desired.

"This is your chamber, miss," said the girl; "and I hope it will meet with your approbation. I sleep in the room adjoining so, that if you should require my services in the night, the hand bell which you see on the table will summon my immediate attendance."

"You are very kind, and considerate," said Phoebe, pleased with the civility of the girl's address; "and I thank you; but I trust that I shall have no necessity to trouble you. May I ask the name of my young friend?"

"I am called Fanny here," replied the girl, "because that was the name of the young woman who held the situation I now occupy, before I came. My real name is Phoebe."

"Phoebe!" repeated our heroine, with some surprise; "my namesake? That is rather strange; but I suppose as you say you are accustomed to it, I must continue to call you Fanny?"

"If you please, miss," replied the girl. "Do you feel inclined to retire to rest? if so, I will assist you to undress if you please."

Phoebe again thanked her and replied in the affirmative, and the girl having performed her task, and seen her new young mistress, whom she was prepared to esteem, comfortably in bed, she bade her good night, and leaving a lamp burning on the table, retired from the room.

Phoebe, however, again got out of bed when Fanny had left the room, and took the precaution, though she had no fears that it was necessary, to fasten the room-door. She then offered up a short prayer to heaven, and feeling more tranquil and confident than she had been for some time, she returned to bed, and endeavoured at once to compose herself to rest.

In this she soon succeeded, and sunk into a sleep which was as sound as it was refreshing.

The noise and hubbub in the streets gradually subsided, all became still in the mansion, so that there was nothing to disturb her; and Phoebe Mayfield in the proud and princely mansion of her betrayer, enjoyed for the first time, since the fatal evening of her elopement, a night of sweet repose.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WOMAN OF FASHION.

The first beams of the morning's sun was shining in at the windows of Phoebe's chamber when she awoke, and opening her eyes gazed around the room in bewildered amazement, for some minutes half unconscious as

to where she was. Recollection, however, at length dawned upon her, and she clasped her hands in thankfulness to the Almighty who had protected her from every harm throughout the night. She felt greatly refreshed, and her spirits were lighter than they had been for several days past.

She arose, and having dressed herself, she endeavoured to collect her thoughts, and to prepare herself for the business one important part of, which, and of which she could not help feeling a certain sensation of dread for which she could not exactly account, was her introduction to the lady whom Lord Selborne had called his cousin, the Honourable Mrs. Wildlove.

While she was thus ruminating, a tap at the room door startled her, but the voice of Fanny outside quickly re-assured her, and opening the door, she admitted the girl, who greeted her with the greatest respect.

"I trust that you have had a good night's rest, miss," she said, as she entered the chamber; "my lord desires me to say that he wishes to see you alone in his sitting-room as soon as it may suit your convenience."

"His lordship is alone, you say Fanny?" interrogated our heroine, looking inquiringly in her face.

"Oh, yes, miss," replied the former; "my lord desired me particularly to assure you of that, Mrs. Wildlove is not a very early riser, and she felt rather poorly last night, and she will therefore most probably indulge in an hour or two extra this morning."

"The lady is amiable, I believe," said Phoebe, looking inquiringly at Fanny, "as all the relations of his lordship I'm sure must be."

Fanny hesitated.

"Why, miss," she faltered out at length, "it would be very unbecoming and presumptuous in me to give any opinion of those above me. The Honourable Mrs. Wildlove, to be sure, is a little bit flighty-like, and fond of pleasure and all that; still I believe she is kind and good—and—but, dear me, miss, how I do talk, and his lordship will be anxiously awaiting your answer."

"I will attend you immediately, Fanny," returned Phoebe, "if you will conduct me to him."

Fanny curtsied, and our heroine, pondering over what she had said respecting the character of the Honourable Mrs. Wildlove, followed the girl from the room, and down the stairs to the room in which Lord Selborne was anxiously awaiting her appearance.



On her entrance, his lordship arose from the table at which he had been seated, and on which breakfast was laid, and with a smile of unfeigned delight, took her hand conducting her to a seat by his side.

Phoebe felt her heart flutter a little at first and some slight misgivings, in spite of herself stole over her; but the looks and manner of Lord Selborne could not fail to reassure her, and she soon recovered her composure, and returned his affectionate attentions with equal warmth and sincerity, but becoming modesty.

The elegance of this apartment, too, like all the others she had yet seen, excited her greatest admiration, while it strengthened the favourable opinion she had always formed of the refined taste of his lordship.

The walls were decorated with several
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family portraits, painted in the most exquisite style of art, and one of Lord Selborne, in his full uniform, and looking exactly as he did when she first beheld him in her native village, so forcibly struck Phoebe, that for some minutes she could not remove her eyes from it.

Lord Selborne watched her narrowly, and a glow of pleasure and satisfaction mantled his cheeks, and animated his breast, for he read the thoughts which at that moment were passing in the fair girl's mind, and could therefore perfectly understand her feelings.

Turning from the portrait, Phoebe caught the glances of his bright and intelligent eyes, as they were fixed so intently upon her, and the deepest blushes suffused her cheeks.

"My dearest Phoebe," said his lordship,

affectionately, and imprinting a kiss upon her cheek, "my sweet little bride elect, how can I express the feelings of ecstasy that animate my breast on again beholding you, even after the brief interval that has taken place since our separation last night? I sincerely hope that you passed a tranquil and comfortable night, and that the arrangements that have been made for your accommodation, at least so far as you have yet seen them, meet with your approbation.

Phoebe unhesitatingly replied in the affirmative, and his lordship felt highly pleased and gratified with the ready satisfaction she expressed.

And did no qualms of conscience, no feelings of compunction for the cruel deception he was practising towards the simple, artless, confiding girl arise with those thoughts in his lordship's breast? They did, but fearful that he might betray himself, he quickly stifled them, and, after a pause, during which his eyes had been rivetted with looks of the most ardent love and admiration on her beauteous countenance, throwing one arm affectionately round her slender waist, and retaining her hand in his, in accents of the utmost tenderness, he said—

"What bewitching diffidence, what sweet retiring modesty are your's my own sweet Phoebe; simplicity and innocence are the music ever flowing from your lips, and virtue blended with all fair woman's most pure and fervent affections, beams forth from your lustrous eyes, and hold the senses in sweet captivity."

"Oh, my lord," replied our heroine, half playfully, smiling archly, yet blushing deeply, "you forget that it is only the poor simple country girl you are thus addressing in terms of flattery so far beyond my humble merits. You bewilder my senses, and I am afraid if you persist in lavishing your praises so abundantly upon me, you will make me quite vain of myself. You play the gay gallant to perfection, my lord."

"Nay," returned Selborne, "misunderstand me not I pray you, dear Phoebe. Fulsome flattery, hollow and insincere, would be but a sorry compliment to your matchless worth. By all my hopes so fondly cherished, I swear that you are the fair being to whom my soul hath bowed in homage and adoration even from the earliest days of boyhood."

"From boyhood, my lord," repeated our heroine, with a look of surprise and perplexity, "surely you forget yourself. At least you utter a problem which I cannot solve. But little more than a month has elapsed since, in my native village, we first beheld each other."

"But my love had not its origin then,

dear Phoebe," said the wily nobleman; "no, even from boyhood, I repeat, one fair, gentle being has been the constant object of my thoughts, and her image, such as my romantic fancy painted it, mingled in my dreams. I wrote sonnets and addressed them to her. I loved to imagine her a beauteous lady captive and myself an armed knight, rescuing her and making her my bride. Sometimes I would conceive her to be a mighty princess, and I the warrior of her hand by my valour in arms."

"Oh, my lord," ejaculated the blushing Phoebe, "surely this was a wild phantasy, yet my heart forbids me to treat it lightly."

"It was indeed a strange infatuation," returned Lord Selborne; "but listen. As I grew in years, and approached to manhood the image of this unknown beauty was divested of much of the romance with which I had associated it, but my imagination only resigned its office to the heart. There in the secret chambers of my being, my thoughts dwelt upon the imagining form of her to whom I had there erected an altar. I knew that a face of glorious beauty, which always came up from the fountain of my soul, when I would think of her, bore her bright resemblance. At length the strange dream of my heart was realised; like some celestial being refulgent in transcendent beauty, you, my Phoebe, burst upon my enraptured sight. With wondering admiration I beheld before me the reality of my early dreams. My soul was in my gaze, and, stranger though I were, I must even to you have betrayed the fond secret of my life."

It would be impossible to describe the strange and tumultuous feelings that agitated our heroine's breast, as she listened to this studied rhapsody of eloquence. Could she doubt the sincerity of the speaker? Could she for a moment believe him capable of so well performing the part of the consummate hypocrite, in order to deceive her, and lure her innocence and virtue to the worst of purposes? It was impossible that she could do so; she had too high an opinion of his honour and integrity. Yet her heart faltered for an answer to his observations.

She was, however, prevented from replying, if she had even the power to do so, by a gentle tap at the room door, and which caused a strange feeling of agitation in her breast, though why she was at a loss to account. The tap was repeated, rather louder than before, and a soft, insinuating female voice, outside the door, said—

"It is only I, Edward, your madcap cousin. Shall I, intrude if I come in?"

"By no means, my lively Grace," replied Selborne; "I have been anxiously waiting you. It is my cousin, Phoebe," he added,

aside to the latter, "compose yourself, and be not bashful; you will find her a most agreeable person, I assure you."

Before our heroine had time to return any reply, the room door was thrown open and the Widow Wildlove stepped lightly into it, and Lord Selborne had led Phoebe to her, and the young widow had taken her hand with a sweet and gracious smile, before she had recovered from her confusion, or was hardly conscious of what was taking place.

The widow was indeed a handsome woman, and, although she was then only in her morning *deshabille*, she always dressed in the very height of fashion, which gave her a most ladylike and attractive appearance, and being young, probably not more than four-and-twenty, rendered her doubly fascinating.

Her form was tall and majestic, and formed with perfect grace and symmetry. Her features were cast in the most perfect mould, and were expressive of everything intelligent, and her eyes beamed forth with a brilliancy which was sometimes almost dazzling and bewildering to gaze upon.

But her's was a description of beauty which presented a marked contrast to that of the modest, retiring, pretty country girl, whose delicate and trembling hand she now held in her's, and could not help gazing upon so fair and gentle a being with feelings of the warmest admiration, not unmingled altogether with those of envy. And there was at times a certain degree of levity blended with the natural vivacity of her manners, the propriety of which might fairly be called into question.

"Your *chère amie*, cousin, I presume," she said, with another gracious smile, and pressing the hand of our heroine warmly, "oh, this is indeed a pleasure that I have been dreaming of all the night, and which has entirely banished the horrible fit of ennui which had somehow stolen upon me. What exquisite beauty and rustic simplicity. Really I must commend your taste, Edward. Do not tremble, my dear girl, or feel abashed at my giddy, plain-spoken manners, it is enough for me to know that you are the intended wife of Lord Selborne, and I am therefore prepared to love you not only as my cousin, but my sister."

"I know you are, my good Grace," returned Lord Selborne, "and bless you for those kind assurances; you will find Phoebe Mayfield all that is worthy of your warmest regard. To your friendly care and protection I commit her, till the happy time arrives, when I can lead her to the altar, and take the whole of that dear and sacred responsibility upon myself."

"Bravo, bravissimo! cousin," exclaimed the young widow, gaily; "you place a proper

reliance on my fidelity, and well will I execute my task. I flatter myself that there are few ladies that move in the highest circles of fashion who are more *au fait* at doing the initiative than myself. But, my dear," she added, speaking to Phoebe, "you must positively shake off this extreme timidity, and banish every feeling of restraint when in company, and make yourself quite easy and at home as soon as possible. Remember that you are to be Lady Selborne, and as such, must aspire to, and command respect from those who have nothing superior to pride themselves upon than their birth. Oh, I have no doubt you will soon become perfect under my tuition."

How poor Phoebe blushed and trembled while the fascinating widow was thus giving vent to her loquacity. She endeavoured to return a suitable reply, but what she said she scarcely knew; however, she gradually, by the kind words and encouraging looks of Lord Selborne, and Mrs. Grace Wildlove, somewhat recovered her composure, and they then took their seats at the breakfast table, and the meal passed over in the most agreeable manner.

Widow Wildlove was a most incessant talker, and, as the reader has probably by this time discovered, she was possessed of an ample stock of vanity, but these, though they at first, confused and abashed Phoebe, now only served to amuse her, and divert her thoughts from more melancholy subjects, and in the course of a little time she felt herself as much at ease and at home in her society as if they had been on terms of intimacy for years.

In this manner the morning passed pleasantly away, when Lord Selborne, who stated that he had a particular appointment which must be attended to, excused himself to our heroine, and quitting the mansion, left her and the Widow Wildlove to themselves, promising to return again as soon as possible.

The garrality of the Widow Wildlove, her lively sallies, and her endless talk upon subjects with which Phoebe was perfectly unacquainted, and which she embellished and exaggerated to the utmost after her own fashion, at first greatly confused and bewildered her; but she gradually became more at ease in her society, her observations served to amuse her, and her vivacious disposition, her inexhaustible flow of spirits and small-talk, pleased and enlivened the simple village girl, if indeed it was only from their novelty.

Ignorant of the artifices practised at times, by the dissipated and abandoned votaries of fashion, when they had any particular or nefarious object in view, Phoebe had no idea of deception, and attributed the rather ques-

tionable remarks and innuendos that, at times, escaped the Widow Wildlove, as proceeding from the natural gaiety of her disposition, rather than from any vitiated taste, or impropriety of motive. She however, listened to her with some surprise, and frequently an unpleasant feeling, for which she could hardly account, would enter her breast, and the crimson blush would rise unbidden, to her cheek.

The widow's keen eye, however, always detected those thoughts and feelings, and she invariably glossed over, and shaped her conversation accordingly.

"You are a charming belle, Phoebe," she remarked, looking into the lovely and intelligent countenance of the fair rustic, with the most enthusiastic admiration; "you are indeed a charming, a most captivating belle, and, with a little more animation in your demeanour, and *colocour de rose* in your cheeks, really could not fail to create quite a sensation in the fashionable world. But positively you must get rid of that rustic simplicity, (so ridiculous in London life) which now characterises you; throw aside these humble habiliments, for dresses more suited to the elevated station in society, in which it is the intention of my noble cousin, Lord Selborne, to place you. You must become more polished and refined in manners, and in order to accomplish which to the entire satisfaction of those who have your interest and welfare at heart, you must endeavour to banish from your recollection all those rural scenes, and rustic pleasures (if so they may be called) to which you have hitherto been accustomed, and enter with becoming spirit and alacrity into that world of gaiety and incessant delight, to which it shall be my task, and that of Lord Selborne to introduce you."

Phoebe listened to her with mingled feelings of surprise and pain; and something very closely resembling disgust, at the same time took possession of her breast.

"Oh, my dear madam," she replied, "surely you were not, could not have been serious in the observations you just now made use of, they sound so strange, so unnatural, and (pardon me for saying so) repugnant to mine ears. What, forget my native village home, the bright scenes by which it is surrounded, and all their fond, their cherished associations, so dear to my heart, banish from my memory those kind though humble friends, who have been my companions from the earliest days of childhood; those rural sports and pleasures, in which I e'er so joyously mingled, and without one thought of guile, or even occasion for one pang of regret—oh, never, never, my heart revolts at the bare idea, and I feel that

I should be very little better than a monster of ingratitude, and should hate and despise myself accordingly. Oh, madam, pray forgive me, if in your opinion, I speak my sentiments too boldly, and without due deference to your superior taste and judgment; but truth and candour hitherto throughout my life, have ever been the maxims I have strictly, sedulously adhered to, and it is my most fervent wish to continue to do so."

"You are a little simpleton, my dear young friend," returned the widow, smiling good humouredly and kindly, "to take so erroneous a view of the observations and suggestions I threw out, but I can readily excuse you at present, and have no doubt that in time, you will properly understand me, and that I shall be able to mould you to my wishes, and to that which at the same time, will promote your own welfare. Oh, you must, you feel delighted with the gay society, and the lively scenes to which I intend to introduce you, and the brilliant contrast they will present to those dull, insipid, and monotonous pastimes, as you call them, in which you have hitherto mingled, cannot fail to captivate you, and to bless the happy moment that introduced you to this wonderful metropolis, and the varied and countless pleasures with which it abounds."

Phoebe remained silent for a few minutes and reflected upon all that the young widow had said, in fact, she was at a loss what answer to make, though she could not bring her mind to coincide with her opinions.

The Widow Wildlove, however, probably thinking it might not be prudent to dwell too much upon the subject most important to her views and designs at present, changed the topic, and the conversation was resumed and continued with much spirit, till the return of Lord Selborne, which was not till a late hour in the afternoon.

Altogether the day, the first that Phoebe Mayfield had passed in town, passed very agreeably away, and she retired at night to her chamber, inspired with somewhat more hope and confidence than she had hitherto been.

CHAPTER XIX.

A WARNING—AN UNWELCOME ARRIVAL— FALSE NEWS.

A week elapsed, without anything particular or worthy of recording occurring to our heroine, though her mind during that time was agitated with various hopes, doubts, and surmises, which Lord Selborne by his unremitting and affectionate attention, and

the Honourable Mrs. Wildlove, by the gaiety of her conversation endeavoured to dispel.

But in spite of everything, our heroine's thoughts would almost constantly wander back to home, and those peaceful happy scenes round which her fondest affections clung, and which she had abandoned, perhaps, for ever. She had written to her parents, and Lord Selborne had done the same, and forwarded (as he stated) the letters without delay, a day or two after their arrival in London, and now she began to feel uneasy and anxious that she had hitherto received no answer, or had heard anything of them. Lord Selborne endeavoured, all in his power, to quiet her apprehensions, and he at length partially succeeded; though there were times when strange thoughts and misgivings would torture her mind.

Dressmakers and mantua makers had been busily set to work by the zealous and indefatigable Widow Wildlove, and Phoebe was now dressed in the most fashionable style, and with such a profusion of splendid and valuable jewellery that she scarcely knew herself, though it cannot be denied that it certainly pleased the little vanity she possessed, and she could not help thinking as she caught a view of her fine handsome figure in the glass, that the change was a decided improvement, and became her most exquisitely.

It must be admitted that she looked beautiful, and few persons would have recognised in that handsome, stately, ladylike figure, Phoebe Mayfield, the poor, humble hedger's daughter.

As Lord Selborne gazed upon her, his love and admiration increased, and again his mind wavered, and he relented in the guilty and cruel design he had against the honour, virtue, and happiness of the innocent, confiding girl.

Surely one whose intrinsic merits rendered her so worthy of his love and admiration, could not be unworthy of his hand; but the pride of birth interposed, and superseded all the other wise, just, and honourable resolutions he might otherwise have formed.

Hitherto there had been no company at the mansion in St. James's square, neither had Phoebe been taken from the house, so jealous did it seem his lordship was of any one beholding her, so that her society was confined to that of himself and his fair cousin; with which our heroine seemed perfectly satisfied, and expressed no wish for a change.

One fine afternoon, when nearly a fortnight had elapsed since her arrival in London, Lord Selborne and the widow being otherwise engaged, Phoebe was seated alone by the window in the parlour, and gazing

listlessly on the persons passing to and fro in the square.

Her thoughts were melancholy, home and all the pleasures she had forsaken, the sorrow, disappointment, anguish, and suspense she had caused her fond old parents, and the faithful Henry Ashford, arose vividly to her distracted imagination, and racked her brain. Their continued silence tortured and alarmed her, and the most dismal forebodings, which she found it impossible to conquer, haunted her mind.

With what dread suspicion must they view her conduct, could they believe her solemn asseverations, after she had so cruelly deceived them? or would they place the least reliance on the honour of Lord Selborne's intentions? Reason told her that they could not, and she shuddered when she reflected on the fearful and fatal position in which her unfortunate and impetuous passion for one so far above her in rank and station had placed her.

The shadow of a human form, and a half suppressed exclamation in a discordant voice, aroused her from these gloomy meditations and arrested her attention, and raising her eyes hastily, she beheld to her surprise the haggard form of what could be scarcely recognised as that of an old woman standing before the area railings, and gazing earnestly at the parlour window, and full upon her countenance.

Phoebe looked more narrowly, for the figure of the wretched being, at the first glance struck her as being familiar to her, and she started from her seat, with a feeling of inexpressible terror and astonishment, on beholding in the frightful features, and small, bright, flashing, unnatural eyes that were fixed with a sardonic grin upon her, those of the mysterious old gipsy sybil, who had obstructed her and Lord Selborne on their way to London.

Phoebe trembled, and seeing that there was no one in the square, was about to ring the bell, to summons the attendance of a servant or Lord Selborne, when the old woman, who seemed to guess her thoughts, with a threatening look, and a motion of the hand, cautioned her not to do so, and made a peremptory sign to her, at the same time, to open the window.

Our heroine, repugnant though it was to her feelings, yet her curiosity urging, feared to disobey, and, with a trembling hand, raising the window, in a faint and faltering voice, demanded what she wanted.

"You recollect me, girl," replied the gipsy, in the same harsh and disagreeable tones, "I see by the terror of your looks, yet, why should you feel alarmed at my appearance, unless your conscience smote you for having

disregarded my warning on a former occasion?"

"Strange woman," returned our heroine, more collected, and in a firmer voice, "I know not why you should obtrude yourself upon me, or I should tremble in your presence, since you are a stranger to me, and I could never have done anything to excite your enmity. What seek you with me, that you come in this suspicious and mysterious manner?"

A malicious grin again distorted the at any time hideous and repulsive features of the sybil as she answered:

"When last we met, girl, the betrayer, the destroyer of female innocence was by your side; since then desolation, misery, and utter despair have fallen upon those who should be dear to you. So far the libertine has triumphed, and his poor deluded victim fancies herself secure under his so called protection, and happy in the fallacious promises he has held out to her. But ere long she will awake from her flattering dream, and terrible will be the anguish of bitter shame and remorse it will then be her lot to endure."

"Fearful woman, forbear," cried the astonished and terrified damsel; "cease those wild predictions, I conjure you, and reserve them for the ignorant and the superstitious."

"And you will do well not to scorn them," said the old woman; "for there may be more truth in them than you now venture to imagine. Can you boldly, fearlessly declare that your conscience even at this moment, reproaches you not for the cruel desertion of your aged parents, and your base ingratitude and infidelity to the worthy youth who loves you so fondly? Have you not your doubts and misgivings regarding the honour of that abandoned nobleman, for whom you have sacrificed them? Your pale features, and quivering lip convince me that it is so, and it is useless for you to attempt to deny it. You have cast aside the garb of honest poverty and innocent simplicity, and now appear in the shameless and degraded harlot's gaudy finery. See that you do not shortly realise the fallen character you now represent."

It would be almost impossible to describe the powerful emotions that agitated the bosom of Phoebe, as the ancient gipsy sybil gave utterance to these fearful and prophetic words, she was inclined immediately to alarm the inmates of the mansion, and have the old woman secured, but terror held her motionless, and the former who again appeared to read her thoughts, laughed derisively, and fixed upon her a look of menace and defiance.

"The boldness of your words, and your

looks of malice, terrify, and disgust me, mysterious woman," ejaculated Phoebe; "oh, why do you seek to alarm and torture a poor, unoffending girl thus? Speak your purpose, I pray you, and begone."

"The gipsy sybil, whom you would fain affect to despise," answered the wretched-looking being; "bears you no enmity, maiden, no, 'tis the guilty who alone provoke her scorn and hatred. Beware, beware in time; for even now you loiter upon the brink of ruin. You have taken the first false step—take not another—recede, ere it is too late, heed not my warning, and inevitable destruction awaits you. Listen:

"List not the flatterer's wily tongue,
Who many a maiden's heart hath wrung;
Fly him, shun him, whilst power you hath,
As you would a serpent in your path.
Think of your honour, parents, fame,
And fly disgrace, remorse, and shame.
Mark the seducer's baneful eye,
Holds thee now spell bound, hence,—oh, fly,
Avoid the betrayer's guilty snare,
Or Phoebe Mayfield's lost for e'er,
Her fate, fell misery, black despair!
Beware! beware! beware!"

The sybil at the conclusion of these lines, uttered a low, wailing, mournful cry, and, overcome with terror, Phoebe sank back in her chair, and covered her face with her hands.

When she again ventured to look up, the strange and fearful being was gone, and the square, as before, was entirely deserted.

But the words of the old woman had left an impression on her mind which it would take some time to remove, and the tumultuous thoughts which at that moment agitated her breast, were of the most torturing description. She became completely lost and bewildered under their influence.

The sudden entrance of Lord Selborne, aroused her from this lethargy of misery, anxiety, and despair, and she gazed at him vacantly, and with mingled feelings of surprise, doubt, and fear.

He noticed the paleness of her face, the wild, restless expression of her eyes, and the extreme agitation of her whole demeanour; and, hastening towards her, he took her hand in his, and gazed eagerly and inquiringly upon her. She shrank and trembled at his touch, and a faint sigh escaped her bosom, whilst tears trembled in her eyes.

His astonishment and anxiety increased. "Dear Phoebe," he exclaimed; "for heaven's sake what is the meaning of all this? What possibly can have occurred to agitate you thus? Speak, and banish my trembling suspense, I implore you."

Poor Phoebe tried to return an answer,

but for the moment her tongue refused its office, and bursting into tears, she hastily averted her looks.

"By heaven!" cried his lordship, with much emotion, and tenderly throwing his arm around her waist; "I cannot endure this. It tortures me to see you weep, Phoebe, and I ignorant of the cause, and therefore powerless to endeavour to remove it. Tell me, I again beseech you, what has occurred to excite your feelings in this violent manner?"

"Oh, Selborne," at length replied our heroine, in a voice which plainly showed the violent tempest of distracting feeling which at that moment raged within her breast; "oh, Selborne, dear Selborne, I implore you, on my knees I supplicate you to quiet, and to dissipate the terrible doubt, suspicions, and apprehensions that have again taken possession of my breast; tell me, oh, convince me that the dreadful statements I have heard, are not true. I cannot, dare not believe them; but it is in your power to banish every feeling of doubt and anxiety, and painful misgiving from my breast, and surely you will not hesitate to do so; you are not false to me, you do not hold out to me bright delusive hopes, which you know will never be realised; you have not lured the poor unexperienced girl from her peaceful, happy home under false pretences, and for the basest of purposes? It is not her ruin that you seek? Oh, no, my throbbing heart, which leaps in fond and pure affection towards you, convinces me, assures me, that the noble soul of Lord Edward Selborne, repels with scorn, with loathing, and disgust the detested idea; he will not, cannot, seek to deceive, to betray, one whom he has flattered with the happiest, fondest hopes and expectations. Let me but hear the blessed words from your own lips, and I am happy!"

She sunk in his arms as she thus gave expression to her emotions, and he was so abashed, confused, and conscience-stricken by what she had said, that for a moment or two he hesitated, and was at a loss what answer to make.

"Dearest Phoebe," at length he said, concealing his real thoughts as well as he could, "how does this melancholy and doubtful expression of feeling grieve and surprise me. Surely after all the solemn protestations I have so frequently made, surely you will not, cannot be so ungenerous as to suspect my sincerity. But something particular must have happened, some malicious and mischievous influence must have been at work to instil such torturing thoughts and fears into your breast. Tell me, I beg of you, whom have you seen? Who has been arousing this tempest of anxiety, and dismal foreboding in your bosom?"

Phoebe looked at him steadily and earnestly for a second or two, as though she would penetrate into the deepest recesses of his heart, and then, in a voice of fear, she said,

"The sybil—the fearful old woman, who before crossed our path—"

"Ah," interrupted Lord Selborne, with a look of surprise and confusion, at the same time a frown of anger darkened o'er his features, "have you then again seen that shameless impostor? Surely she has not had the daring to intrude herself upon you here, Phoebe?"

"She appeared suddenly at the window, but a short time since," replied Phoebe, "and the unnatural expression of her haggard and repulsive features, and the fearful words she uttered, still haunt my imagination, and, in spite of all my efforts to subdue it, fill my breast with terror."

"The daring old hag," exclaimed the enraged nobleman betwixt his teeth, "she does but act in this scandalous manner for the base purpose of extorting money, and should she again venture to appear before me, I will quickly deliver her into the hands of justice."

"Oh, my lord," said our heroine, "pardon me, I do beseech you, if I appear too urgent but surely the delicate situation in which I am placed, so far away from my home, and without receiving any communication from my parents, is worthy of every kind sympathy and consideration. You know, you must feel, the confidence and reliance I place in the honour and integrity of your motives, or I never would have taken the hazardous course I have done, through your flattering promises and persuasions. Those promises I dare not suspect that you will fail to perform, yet the awful words, the predictions, the warnings, so solemn and impressive, that were uttered by that mysterious woman, make me shudder to think of them, and excite in my bosom a nameless sensation of dread."

"And can you, Phoebe," returned his lordship, with a look of gentle reproach, "can you for a moment suffer the words of an idle vagrant or mad woman to make any impression on your mind, to excite in your breast unjust suspicions of my truth and honour, and to prejudice you against me? I little thought that Phoebe could ever have been persuaded to doubt the sincerity of the vows I have so often uttered to her, the promises that, from my heart, I have made to her. Alas, how must you wrong me by the supposition, and what can I say, what can I do, to convince you of the purity of my intentions? Although it would annihilate all my hopes, and break my heart to do so, say but the word, express but the wish, and

will at once restore you to your friends, innocent as when you quitted your paternal roof, and abandon all those bright visions in which my fond and fervid imagination has so long indulged."

He spoke those words with such tender feeling and apparent sincerity, that the doubts, the fears, and misgivings of poor Phoebe were at once dispelled, and she threw herself weeping and sobbing with the power of her excited feelings in his arms.

It was some minutes ere she could sufficiently recover her composure to utter a word, but at length she entered into a calm explanation to Lord Selborne of all that had taken place, so seriously to alarm, and related to him every particular of the strange observations and predictions which the old woman had uttered, and to which his lordship listened with feelings which the reader may easily imagine.

"The insolent impostor," he exclaimed, when our heroine had concluded; "would that I had seen her, I would have given her cause to repent her boldness. She must bear me some secret malice, some deadly hatred, though for why I am at a loss to imagine, for I do not remember ever to have seen her before the occasion of our meeting on the way to London. But you will dismiss from your memory her wild and ridiculous prognostications, I know, Phoebe. Will you not, dearest?"

"I will endeavour to do so," she replied; "but oh, Selborne, think of the delicacy of my situation, and how ready the voice of scandal is to spit forth its venom against the weak, the innocent, and defenceless. If you are sincere in your promises to make me your wife, why delay? I beseech you either at once restore me to my friends as the still innocent Phoebe Mayfield, or banish my doubts, end all suspense and misgivings, and stifle the voice of slander, by leading me to the altar."

"But a few days longer, Phoebe," replied his lordship, "wait but a few short days longer, patiently, calmly, confidently, and I will then faithfully, solemnly fulfil my promise. But for certain reasons which I probably, need not explain to you, our marriage must be strictly private. Captain Beaufort writes me word that I may expect him in London to-morrow or the next day, and on his arrival, I can arrange everything with him for the completion of my wishes, and our happiness shall be no longer delayed. I have particular reasons for desiring that Captain Beaufort, my cousin, the Widow Wildlove, and probably your maid, Fanny should be the only witnesses of the ceremony. Are you satisfied with this arrangement, my love?"

"Oh, how can I be otherwise?" answered the poor girl; "dear Selborne these assurances remove every doubt and suspicion from my mind, and render me happy; for I do believe, I know that you will not, cannot deceive me."

"By all my fondest, dearest hopes, never!" exclaimed the libertine vehemently, as he kissed rapturously the blushing cheek of his intended victim.

A disagreeable laugh of scorn and derision, outside, near the window, startled him and aroused his indignation, while it elicited an exclamation of terror from Phoebe. They both gazed eagerly towards the spot from whence the sound proceeded, and there again, before the window, her long, bony hand stretched forth menacingly towards Selborne, and her bright eyes fixed with a look of malice and bitter mockery upon him, stood the mysterious, and fearful old gipsy sybil!

Our heroine clung to him with alarm, and for a minute or two she had not the power to give utterance to a word, but at the same time she could not remove her eyes from the frightful countenance of the old woman, who did not change her attitude in the least, but again laughed exultingly, and continued to gaze on the astonished and enraged nobleman with a look of defiance.

"Shall I famely endure this insolence?" he passionately exclaimed, as he endeavoured to disengage himself from Phoebe, with the intention of summoning his attendants to secure the gipsy.

"Oh, forbear, my lord, I entreat you," said the agitated Phoebe, still clinging to him, and detaining him from the execution of his purpose; "shun her, approach her not; the unfortunate woman must be mad, or she never could act thus towards those who have never offended her. Let her go; do not offer to molest her; heed her not, I implore."

The old woman seemed to understand what the poor girl was saying, for she fixed upon her a look of terrible and ominous meaning, then once more laughing in the same unnatural manner that she had done before, and waving her hand with scorn and defiance at his lordship, she turned hastily away from the spot, and was gone in an instant.

Phoebe was so overpowered by her emotions that she could not utter a word, and his lordship, exasperated beyond all expression, but endeavouring to stifle his thoughts and feelings as well as he could, led her away from the room.



CHAPTER XX.

THE MIDNIGHT MARRIAGE.

We will not dwell upon the emotions which this strange and alarming adventure excited in the bosom of our heroine, or the anger and confusion it caused Lord Selborne. Suffice it to say that he subdued his own feelings in order to quiet her apprehensions, and in which effort he succeeded much better than might have been expected.

But when alone, and left to the uninterrupted indulgence of her own thoughts, Phoebe could not but reflect upon the observations and prognostications of the sybil with fear and trembling, and they had left an impression on her mind which it would be difficult to eradicate.

No. 8.

The following morning, as Lord Selborne had anticipated, Captain Beaufort arrived at the mansion, and his lordship having given him a hearty welcome, conducted him to the library, where they were closeted for some time.

"I am right glad you have arrived, my dear fellow," said Lord Selborne, when they were alone, "for I much needed your presence, your assistance, and advice in London. But now tell me, Beaufort, for I am, as you must be aware, all impatience to know, what news have you from the village, eh?"

"Oh, bad enough, my lord, I can assure you," answered Captain Beaufort, "though I don't suppose it will affect you much. But first tell me, how far have you progressed in your designs against your little rustic innamorata?"

"Oh, slowly, but nevertheless, I think, securely," replied his lordship, "she has at times her doubts and misgivings, but I think that I have pretty well conquered them, and much depends upon you. I place every reliance on your skill, wit, and ingenuity, captain."

"You are right to do so, my lord," returned Beaufort, "but we have not a little to expect from the artifices of my charming Widow Wildlove. Your amiable *cousin*, as you find no doubt, it suits your purpose to designate her. Ha, ha, ha! how fares my charmer?"

"Excellently," replied Selborne, "and she will be delighted at your return, but she is at present absent from home. Now, my dear fellow, pray do not keep me any longer in suspense. How fare they all in the country? The old people, Henry Ashford, all the friends of Phoebe? Did not her elopement cause a great sensation, eh?"

"Sensation!" repeated Beaufort, "aye, and something more than that, which it would not be altogether prudent to make Phoebe Mayfield acquainted with, or perchance it might drive her crazy."

"Ah," interrogated Selborne, with a look of eager curiosity and alarm, "what mean you? Tell me, quick."

"Well," said Beaufort, with cool and heartless indifference, "the tale is soon told. The old people, the parents of Phoebe, I mean, were making merry with the villagers in the Hazel Dell, and expecting her to join them every minute, when Henry Ashford, who it seems had got possession of the open letter which Phoebe had left behind her in the cottage, arrived in the dell with the fatal intelligence of her elopement. The shock was too great for old Dame Mayfield, and she sunk in the arms of her husband, struck with death. She had broken her heart, as it is called, though for my own part I never could understand it, and she died the same night."

"Died—died!" repeated Lord Selborne, with a look of horror and remorse; "poor, unfortunate old woman; and I have been the guilty cause of her untimely fate. Alas, how bitterly do I now reproach myself."

"Psha, colonel," returned the reckless and abandoned Captain Beaufort, "this is a display of childish weakness which I did not think you capable of. Why should the death of the silly old woman trouble you? You did not seek it, or calculate upon it."

"True," coincided Selborne, somewhat more composed, "but was it not my guilty conduct which brought about the calamity? Oh, did Phoebe but know what has so awfully happened, what would be her horror, anguish, and despair?"

"It must be our careful task to keep her in ignorance of it," observed Beaufort, "I am prepared with a tale to blind her, and to quiet all her apprehensions."

"Ah, say you so?" said his lordship, eagerly, "that is well. I will leave everything to you and the widow, and no doubt you will be able to accomplish your task in the most satisfactory manner. But she grows impatient for the marriage."

"The marriage," repeated the captain, with a sarcastic and significant grin.

"Yes," said Selborne, "and I have been compelled to promise her that it shall take place in a few days after your arrival in London."

"Which promise," returned Beaufort; "you can fulfil, in so far as the mockery of a marriage you intend it shall be. There is no occasion for any delay, and the sooner therefore that part of the business is settled the better. It will quiet all the girl's scruples and apprehensions, and obtain for you the accomplishment of your wishes, the completion of your designs."

"True," said Lord Selborne, in a tone of satisfaction; "we will, however, talk further on this business anon."

"Aye," observed the captain; "but there is one fact which it may, perhaps, be unnecessary for me to remind you of."

"And what is that?"

"I'm in want of cash."

"Humph! quite cleared out?"

"Quite cleared out at present, colonel. I've been deuced unfortunate at play, lately; then the turf has produced me little or nothing, but bad luck. In fact, the fickle dame fortune, seems to have abandoned me latterly altogether; and what makes it the more annoying, those damned creditors will keep besieging me like so many hungry wolves. 'Tis a bad thing, my lord, to be a gentleman without means."

"True. But I suppose I must assist you out of your difficulties."

"Of course you will," said the captain that is if you consider my services of any value."

"Enough," returned Lord Selborne; "you know I never refuse you."

"You have not, my lord, and I thank you."

"Here is a blank cheque, you can fill it up for any amount you may require."

"Thanks. Your lordship is most kind and considerate."

"I may then depend upon your fidelity?"

"You may, you have never yet had cause to doubt me."

"I have not. But—"

He was interrupted by a loud knock at the street door.

"It is your charming widow returned," said his lordship. "We will arrange matters together."

Widow Wildlove was now announced, and shortly after entered the room; and here we will leave those three worthies for awhile together, to concoct and mature their nefarious designs, and return to Phoebe, who on the arrival of the captain was seated alone, and wrapped in meditation, in the parlour, and saw him alight from the chaise at the door.

The boldness and levity of this man had ever been most offensive and disgusting to our heroine. She had indeed felt surprised that his lordship admitted him into his society, much more honoured him with his friendship; and she had at all times felt uneasy when she met him in his society.

But now she felt a most unconquerable anxiety to speak with him, and her heart palpitated so violently against her side when she beheld him; and such a variety of feelings came over her, such a wild tumult of hopes, and doubts, and fears, that she could scarcely contain herself.

He had come from her native village; he could inform her of all the particulars she so much wanted to know. All about her dear parents and Henry Ashford, everything that had happened after her elopement, and how they now were. He could inspire her with the brightest hopes, or fill her mind with the blackest despair; and various and conflicting were the conjectures that racked her brain, and gloomy at times were the forebodings that tortured her.

"Oh, heaven grant that they have pardoned the course, the desperate and dangerous course I have been induced to pursue," she ejaculated, clasping her hands together; "that they have been able to summon fortitude to their aid to support my unexpected departure, and that no dark suspicions have entered their breasts of the integrity and virtue of my motives. But they will not, they cannot surely believe me lost and abandoned. They will not close their hearts against me and discard me from their affections for ever. Oh, I cannot for a moment endure that dreadful thought. Yet they have never answered my letters, and their silence tortures me. Captain Beaufort can banish this suspense, and oh, that he may speak the truth, and have nothing but the most hopeful intelligence to impart to me."

Still she could not divest her mind of the strange and dismal presentiments that had taken possession of it, and she awaited with the utmost impatience till she had an opportunity of speaking with Captain Beaufort.

More than an hour, however, elapsed without any signs of her wishes being gratified,

and she began to think that they had forgotten her, or that the intelligence they had to impart to her was of that painful and melancholy nature, that they dreaded to communicate it.

At length, however, her anxiety was somewhat abated by the entrance of Fanny, with a message from his lordship, desiring her attendance in the drawing-room, where he and the widow, and Captain Beaufort were seated.

With throbbing heart, and full of expectation Phoebe obeyed, and Captain Beaufort arose on her entrance into the room, and greeted her with the utmost gallantry, and apparent friendship, congratulating her on her personal appearance, which he really thought was the most charming he had ever gazed upon.

Phoebe, however, could not restrain her anxiety, and she eagerly inquired after her dear parents, and how they had supported her flight.

Captain Beaufort did not appear to hesitate or to be the least disconcerted by the question, and he assured her that when he had left the neighbourhood of the village, they were quite well as he could ascertain, and, sent her their blessing at the same time requesting him to inform her that circumstances had hitherto prevented their writing to her, but that they would do so at the earliest opportunity, and that they placed every reliance in the honour of Lord Selborne, and trusted that the time was not far distant when they should all meet in happiness again together.

Phoebe fixed her keen and penetrating eyes earnestly upon the countenance of Captain Beaufort as he thus spoke, and seemed to be endeavouring to read his thoughts, but he withstood her searching glances with the utmost composure, and there was nothing whatever in the expression of his features, or his general demeanour to give her room to doubt the truth or sincerity of what he had uttered.

"Captain Beaufort," she said seriously, "I solemnly implore you to assure me that you have spoken the truth?"

"Surely," replied the designing villain, with a slight appearance of resentment, "Miss Mayfield cannot entertain any doubt, or suspect for a moment that I would so far degrade myself as to seek to deceive her. I again, if necessary, repeat most solemnly that what I have stated is correct, and unexaggerated."

"Then thanks, thanks, Captain Beaufort, for that blessed assurance," exclaimed our agitated heroine, her eyes filling with tears; "it has removed a weight of care and anxiety from my breast which was almost insupportable."

able. But, oh, tell me, I implore you, how did my dear old parents bear the shock of my elopement? Were, oh, were they not distracted?"

"Why, Miss Phoebe," replied Beaufort; "it would be folly to attempt to deny that they were. At first they were completely overwhelmed with astonishment, grief, and despair; and reproached you for your cruel ingratitude, and his lordship in the most unmeasured terms, for the treacherous and dishonourable part they supposed that he had acted. But I was in the Dell at the time, and after the violent ebullition of their grief and passion was over, I ventured to remonstrate with them, pointed out to them the erroneousness of the conclusions they had arrived at, the injustice they did to you and Lord Selborne, and finally I succeeded in calming their feelings, and convincing them that you had done nothing which might cause the blush of shame to mantle on their cheeks."

Tears again gushed to the eyes of poor Phoebe, and taking the hand of Captain Beaufort, she raised it gratefully and respectfully to her lips.

Lord Selborne fixed upon her a look of the utmost affection, and congratulated her on the welcome and unexpected information she had received from Captain Beaufort; and he then endeavoured to change the topic of conversation, and to divert her attention from the other melancholy subjects that engrossed her thoughts.

But Phoebe felt her mind too greatly agitated to permit her to enter with any degree of spirit or patience into conversation, and she shortly formed an excuse to retire for awhile to her own room in order to collect herself.

"Bravo, Beaufort," said the young nobleman, when they were alone, the Widow Wildlove having also retired; "you have played you part so far admirably, completely deceived Phoebe, and quieted those apprehensions that were beginning to obtain too powerful an ascendancy in her breast. I thank you, from my heart, I thank you."

"Oh, name it not, my lord," replied the crafty libertine; "you know how anxious I ever am to serve you, likewise the ability I have to do so. I think the story I told her was a most plausible one."

"Yes, yes," said Selborne, hastily, "it was indeed cleverly done. But still, poor girl, it is most cruel to deceive her thus, and—"

"Bah!" interrupted the villain, Beaufort, impatiently; "you will fail in the final accomplishment of your designs depend on it, if you suffer yourself to give way to those qualms of conscience."

"Nay, Beaufort," returned Lord Selborne, with a look of compunction; "in spite of all

my efforts, I cannot treat this business so lightly as you would have me do. It does indeed seem monstrous thus to deceive one so good and innocent. Alas! what would be the horror of the poor girl's feelings, how bitter the curses and reproaches she must heap upon my head, did she but know of the melancholy and untimely fate of her aged parents, to whom she was so fondly attached."

"I have no patience, my lord," said Beaufort, "with this maudlin trash, and pardon me, but if you persist in it, I must beg to retire. I am in no mood for such grave matters, I assure you, and would much rather crack a bottle and a joke."

"Captain Beaufort," said Lord Selborne, deliberately, after a pause, and looking steadfastly at him, "Captain Beaufort, you are a most consummate scoundrel."

"You flatter me, my lord," replied the captain, coolly, and laughing; "I am very proud and happy to be able to return the compliment to your lordship, with interest, but with this slight exception only, namely, that you have not had exactly that experience in the school of villainy that I have; but you are an apt scholar, and no doubt under my tuition, and others, your education will be finished ere long, and you will come out highly polished."

"Psha!" exclaimed Selborne, haughtily, and angrily; "you mock me."

"I do but offer you a fair retort," answered Beaufort; "and therefore, my lord, you should not take offence, or lose your temper. However, seriously speaking, if you do repent of what you have done, and wish to make atonement, why e'en abandon your designs, divulge the truth to Phoebe Mayfield, restore her to her village home, and then, of course, there will be no further occasion for my services. But methinks it would be a pity for you to come to that determination after all the trouble, expense, ingenuity, and anxiety of mind it has cost you to proceed thus far with your designs."

"Resign the beauteous Phoebe," exclaimed Lord Selborne, vehemently, "relinquish all those blissful hopes and wishes I have so long and so fondly cherished and indulged in? Never! no Beaufort, it was but the weakness of the moment that caused me to make use of the rash expressions I did, and I therefore crave your patience and indulgence. No time shall now be lost in bringing about the consummation of my happiness."

"Aye, my lord," remarked Beaufort, approvingly, "now you speak something like, and I am your's to command. The game's your own, if you only play your cards wisely, and nothing whatever, but any weakness or wavering on your own part can prevent the completion of your triumph."

"I will follow your advice, Captain Beaufort, in particular," said Lord Selborne, "but we must use every precaution, or we might betray ourselves. Phoebe has a keen penetration, and any temporary forgetfulness on our part would be sure to arouse her suspicions in a moment, and frustrate all our schemes."

Captain Beaufort returned a suitable answer to this, and they continued to converse together, and to arrange all their plans for the future, till the widow and Phoebe rejoined them, which was not till the hour of dinner.

Phoebe, during the time she had been left to herself, had given free indulgence to the varied and powerful emotions which the statement of Captain Beaufort had excited in her breast, and many were the tears she had shed when she thought of her poor old parents, and the loneliness and melancholy they must feel, now she was away from them. But the reflection that she would shortly be restored to them as the wife of Lord Selborne, and remove them from poverty to wealth and happiness, making their declining days those of serenity and comfort, afforded her that joy and consolation which it would be difficult to describe.

"Yes, dear Selborne," she soliloquised, "I know, I am confident that you will faithfully keep your word. I will no longer doubt you, and in that reflection I will endeavour to be happy."

It was such thoughts as these that calmed the poor girl's mind, and imparted that cheerfulness and contentment to her looks, which Lord Selborne could not help noticing with pleasure, when she rejoined them at dinner.

* * * * *

Another week wore slowly and tediously away at the mansion in St. James's Square, without anything particular occurring. There were no visitors, and Phoebe saw no one save Lord Selborne, the widow, and Captain Beaufort, so for all that she had yet experienced, she might have considered a London life dull, insipid, and monotonous enough, were it not that her thoughts were too busily occupied on other subjects, to allow her to give any serious attention to it.

At length Lord Selborne, in terms of the most apparent affectionate delight, announced to our blushing heroine the time he had fixed upon for their union, and the arrangements he had made with a clergyman, a confidential friend of his, for the due and solemn performance of the ceremony, which, as he had before stated, was, for obvious reasons which he forcibly impressed upon Phoebe, to be strictly private, and to take place at mid-

night in an ancient chapel attached to an old mansion of his, situated a short distance from town.

With what mingled feelings of delight and gratitude to Lord Selborne, for the honourable performance of his promise, did Phoebe receive this announcement. All former doubts and fears were now removed from her mind, and she looked forward to the future with the brightest and fondest hopes and expectations.

She was left with the Widow Wildlove—who seemed enraptured with the task which had devolved on her—to make all the necessary preparations for the joyous and important occasion.

The important day at length arrived. At an early hour of the morning, before there were many persons about, a closed chaise was at the door into which Lord Selborne handed the trembling Phoebe, attired in white, and looking bewitchingly modest and beautiful. She was followed by her maid and the Widow Wildlove, and the vehicle then drove off at a rapid rate, Selborne and Captain Beaufort, with their grooms, proceeding behind on horseback.

The place of their destination was an old country mansion, which had been a favourite residence of some of his lordship's ancestors, but which he probably only visited once in a season or two, and then always made his stay as brief as possible.

It was called Selborne Hall, and was situated about thirty miles from London in the county of Essex.

It was a straggling, gothic, moss and ivy-mantled building, situated amidst stately trees, in the midst of a fine park of some extent, and surrounded by scenery of a diversified and picturesque description. The hall itself had a most venerable appearance, and was quite in accordance with the taste of our heroine, for it reminded her of home, and the pleasant scenes among which, from the earliest days of childhood, she had been accustomed to ramble.

The little chapel, too, attached, corresponded with the main features of the building, and like it was overgrown with moss and ivy, which gave it a grave and solemn appearance.

The few domestics who resided at the hall were as old-fashioned in their looks as the building itself, and had all of them inhabited the place for many, many years, and had grown grey in it.

Even the tenantry on the estate, from the children to the grand-parents, had the same aged aspect, and might have been supposed to be almost coeval with the building.

The shadows of evening were fast falling on all around when the travellers arrived at

the end of their journey; for, after they had got from the immediate vicinity of London, the chaise had proceeded at only a very moderate rate, and they stopped several times to refresh themselves.

The chaise had just entered upon the principal drive which led up to the gothic portico of the hall, when the postillion having shouted in vain, it came to a sudden stop, and our heroine and her companions having looked out to ascertain the cause, perceived a human form standing in the centre of the road in a fixed and impressive attitude, and which, from its appearance was that of a woman.

A feeling of dread and strange foreboding took possession of Phoebe on seeing this strange being, and she continued to gaze at her with the most anxious curiosity, but without being able to utter a word to her companions, who were astonished, and not unamused with the adventure.

At length the woman moved from the spot on which she had been standing, and slowly approached the carriage, so closely indeed that Phoebe had a distinct view of her person and features; and the reader may judge of her emotions, when she recognised in them those of the old gipsy sybil."

Her ugly features were still more frightfully distorted by a sardonic and sarcastic grin, and her eyes seemed to beam with more than their wonted fire, and they were fixed full upon the pale countenance of our heroine alone, and her long, brown, bony arm was stretched forth significantly towards her.

Phoebe, however, was not suffered to gaze long, for Lord Selborne and Beaufort, who had ascertained what was the cause of the stoppage of the chaise, and were riding angrily up to the old woman, when she uttered a loud and scornful laugh, and bounded from the spot with a speed and agility that could not have been expected in one of her great apparent age.

Selborne and Captain Beaufort, surprised and vexed at the boldness of the gipsy, rode after her, with the determination of detaining her, and handing her into custody, till her designs could be ascertained; but the old woman continued her flight with unabated speed; once or twice turning round, glaring maliciously at Lord Selborne and his companion, and laughing triumphantly, and taking the path which led to one of the park entrances.

Here to the astonishment, and no little alarm of Lord Selborne he beheld the same ruffian who had before crossed his path on his journey to London, with several more armed gipsies, whose looks were of the most savage and threatening description.

Surprised and dismayed, and fearful of

coming into collision with those desperate people, Selborne and the captain made a sudden stop, and awaited the arrival of the chaise which was approaching, and they had no sooner done so than a loud shout of exultation and derision arose from the gipsies, and the next moment they disappeared hastily at the park-gates.

Phoebe had watched with feelings of suspense and alarm all that had taken place, and on Lord Selborne and Captain Beaufort riding up to the vehicle they found her pale and agitated, and leaning on the Widow Wildlove, who was endeavouring to compose her feelings, and quiet her apprehensions, for support.

His lordship conquered his own emotions and excitement as well as he could, and exerted himself to the utmost to tranquillise and re-assure her, and the chaise was immediately driven up to the principal entrance to the hall, where Peter, the old steward, his aged wife, a comely, amiable looking dame, and the other few domestics, male and female, who resided in the mansion, were assembled to receive and welcome them.

At the sight of these humble, but friendly individuals, the spirits of our heroine revived, but her heart fluttered, and she could not help feeling a trembling sensation come over her, when his lordship handed her out of the carriage, and she knew that so many eyes were fixed with curiosity upon her.

Lord Selborne, however, by a smiling look, encouraged her, and taking her hand, hurried her through the group of servants into the hall, followed by Captain Beaufort and the Widow Wildlove.

Being seated in one of the principal apartments, which was furnished, and bore a corresponding aspect to the exterior of the hall, Lord Selborne and his companions congratulated Phoebe on the termination of the journey, and then endeavoured to cheer her spirits, and to banish from her recollection the recent adventure with the mysterious old sybil and the other gipsies. But that was a task rather difficult to accomplish, especially as the circumstances had occurred at the time it did.

His lordship's arguments and persuasions, however, and the gaiety of the volatile widow and Captain Beaufort, at length prevailed, and Phoebe became comparatively happy.

The dinner, and arrival of the Reverend Mr. Alton, were announced simultaneously, and our heroine blushed and trembled, for Lord Selborne informed her that this was the gentleman, his particular and confidential friend, who had undertaken the performance of the marriage ceremony, and she was introduced to him with much formality, which added to her excitement and embarrassment.

The appearance of the reverend gentleman was anything but prepossessing, and Phoebe shrunk from his rather bold and vulgar scrutiny with an unaccountable feeling of dread and repugnance, but which she found it in vain to endeavour to conquer or control.

The Reverend Mr. Alton—as he was introduced to our heroine—was a short, thick-set, middle-aged man, with a vulgar and sinister expression of features, which he endeavoured to qualify by a superscilious smile, but which rendered them, if possible the more repulsive. He had a low, narrow forehead, and small, piggish, deep set eyes, which, however, at times sparkled with an unnatural lustre; and a huge pair of black whiskers, gave him anything but a reverend appearance.

The reverend gentleman was certainly not very loquacious, in fact, he talked but little and what he did say savoured more of ignorance and common-place, than any other quality.

Phoebe felt far from easy in the company of this gentleman, although his lordship had introduced him as his intimate and particular friend; and she felt anxious for the ceremony to be over, when she might hope that he would, in all probability, take his departure from the hall.

The hours passed quickly away, and, as the appointed hour approached, the agitation and anxiety, the fears, doubts, hopes, and suspicions of Phoebe increased, and her fortitude almost entirely forsook her.

About an hour before the appointed time, the Rev. Mr. Alton, Captain Beaufort, and the Widow Wildlove retired from the room, as if by previous arrangement, and Phoebe and Lord Selborne were left to themselves.

He now exerted himself to the utmost to raise the spirits of the trembling maiden, and to inspire her breast with feelings of happy hope and confidence.

He drew a glowing picture of the future happiness that was in store for her; again and again repeated his vows of ardent love and constancy, called her his beloved wife, and lavished upon her every fond endearment, that affection could suggest or honour sanction.

And could poor Phoebe remain unmoved, or insensible to his affectionate attentions? It was impossible that she could; and throwing herself into his arms, she hid her blushing face on his bosom, and her heart responded freely to the warm feelings he had so passionately and so eloquently expressed.

The long anticipated moment which was to seal the fate of Phoebe Mayfield for ever, arrived. The hour of twelve struck from the old clock in the hall, and Phoebe, having been equipped for the ceremony by her maid

Fanny, who had accompanied her on the journey, was again ushered into the presence of Lord Selborne, who took her arm with an encouraging smile, and led her from the hall towards the chapel, followed by Fanny, and the old steward and his wife, who had, at the request of our heroine herself, been permitted to be present at the marriage ceremony.

The widow and Captain Beaufort met them at the door of the chapel, and with a trembling step, and a violently throbbing heart, Phoebe was ushered into the sacred building.

Long candles, which gave it the appearance of a Roman catholic ceremony, were burning on the altar, behind which the Reverend Mr. Alton was standing, attired for the solemn occasion.

The chapel was small, and it had a truly venerable appearance, the stone wall, and the pillars that supported the roof, being blackened by age. The windows were of stained glass, and being reflected upon by the lights burning upon the altar, were shown with great and striking effect.

But the thoughts of Phoebe were too busily occupied, and her mind too much agitated to suffer her to take any particular notice of those particulars, and with the most powerful and indescribable emotions, and a bewildered brain, she was conducted by Lord Selborne to the altar, and followed by the widow and Captain Beaufort.

The libertine and his beauteous victim knelt before the altar; there was a profound and solemn silence of a few seconds, and then the ceremony commenced, and was continued to the conclusion without interruption.

A paper was then handed by the Rev. Mr. Alton to his lordship, which himself and Phoebe were requested to sign, which they did, without looking at the contents of the document in the excitement of the moment, Captain Beaufort and the widow then also attached their signatures to the paper; Lord Selborne rapturously clasped our blushing heroine to his bosom and saluted her as his bride, and the other persons present warmly congratulated her as Lady Selborne!

In a state of agitation which we need not seek to describe, Phoebe was re-conducted from the chapel, followed by those who had been present at the ceremony, but immediately on issuing from the door, they were surprised and alarmed by the loud buzz of numerous voices, and then the reflection of several torches, and before they had hardly time to conjecture the cause of this event, the old gipsy sybil, and her rough and uncouth companions appeared before them, their wild and savage expression of features distinctly revealed to them in the broad glare of the torches they carried with them.

Phoebe uttered a faint cry of terror, and clung closely to Lord Selborne, and he could not help feeling uneasy and alarmed at this unexpected and unwelcome congregation. But he quickly recovered his self-possession, and sternly and peremptorily demanded of the sybil, the meaning of this intrusion.

A malicious grin overspread the repulsive features of the old woman, as, in her usual harsh and discordant tones, she answered :

" You did not expect me and my friends on this auspicious occasion, Lord Selborne ; but the gipsy sybil could not fail to congratulate you on the success of your deep laid schemes for the destruction of female innocence. Oh, it is a noble deed ; one worthy of the *honoured* name of Lord Selborne. Comrades, give vent to your feelings of respect, admiration, and gratification at the triumph of his lordship !"

A deafening shout, more like the yell of savage beasts than anything human, burst forth from the gipsies at this insolent speech, and Lord Selborne, Beaufort, and the widow stood completely astonished and bewildered.

Phoebe, completely overpowered by the terror and agitation of her feelings, screamed and fainted in the arms of Lord Selborne ; and glaring with malicious exultation upon them, the gipsies slowly retired from the spot, before Lord Selborne or his friends had time, or had sufficiently recovered themselves to put another question to them.

Thus terminated the doubtful midnight marriage of Phoebe Mayfield.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BAL MASQUE—THE MEETING.

We will pass over the emotions of Phoebe on recovering her senses, and remembering all the painful and alarming circumstances of this mysterious adventure. It was a considerable time ere Lord Selborne could at all calm her feelings or quiet her apprehensions, but at last, to some extent, he succeeded in doing so, and she endeavoured, if not to forget it, at least to think of it not so seriously as she had done before.

The Reverend Mr. Alton, and Captain Beaufort, who seemed to be on still more intimate terms with him than Lord Selborne, took their departure from the hall, but it was the intention of his lordship, with Phoebe and the widow, to remain at least a week at Selborne Hall, previous to returning to London ; which arrangement afforded our heroine every satisfaction.

Phoebe now felt supremely happy, Lord Selborne had fulfilled his promise, she could

not for a moment suspect that she was not his wife, and the change in her circumstances was so great ; her being taken from obscurity and suddenly placed in the most exalted, rank were so extraordinary, that it quite bewildered her senses, and she could scarcely persuade herself but that she was labouring under the influence of some delusive dream.

Lord Selborne seemed to redouble his affectionate attentions to her, and was scarcely ever absent an hour from her society. He anticipated her thoughts and wishes, and was most studious of her happiness in every shape and form, and in these endeavours he was warmly and enthusiastically assisted by the handsome and captivating young widow, and our heroine felt that she was indeed most fortunate, and she had scarcely a single desire that remained long ungratified.

She could have wished that the marriage had been conducted less secretly, and not so mysteriously, and that the ceremony had been performed by any other clergyman than the Reverend Mr. Alton, of whom, though why she knew not, she entertained a very different opinion, but Lord Selborne banished those feelings of dissatisfaction from her breast, and gave her sufficient and plausible reasons for the arrangements he had made.

She wrote a most affectionate letter to her parents, informing them of all that had taken place, and imploring their blessing for herself and her husband ; and this Lord Selborne promised to forward without delay, with one of his own, together with a handsome present to the poor old people, and this added to her happiness and satisfaction.

At the expiration of little more than a week, they quitted Selborne Hall, and started on their return to the metropolis, where his lordship informed her it was his intention for the first time to introduce her to his friends and acquaintances as Lady Selborne.

Phoebe felt some anxiety and timidity upon that subject, which his lordship, however, quickly appeased, and she looked forward to the events that were in store for her with pleasurable expectation.

In due time they once more arrived at the mansion in St. James's Square, where they found Captain Beaufort, who, having parted from his friend the clergyman, was waiting to give them a cordial reception.

Several weeks now elapsed, and the prospects of Phoebe seemed to brighten, and her happiness to increase. Nothing could be more devoted and unremitting than the fond attentions of Lord Selborne, and he studied her pleasure and her wishes in every possible way.

There were now almost daily fashionable parties at the mansion, and the first introduction to society that was so new to her



over Phoebe gradually began to feel more at ease, and under the assiduous instructions and exertions of the gay Widow Wildlove, to get rid of many of her rustic habits, but her tastes, her wishes, and her feelings suffered no change, they remained the same as when she was at home in her native village, among her humble friends.

She was the admired of all who saw her, or who enjoyed the pleasure of her society, and while every one commended the taste of Lord Selborne, in selecting so fair and amiable a being for his wife, there were many who envied him his happiness.

There was one thing, however, which caused Phoebe the greatest uneasiness and anxiety; and that was the continued neglect of her parents to write to her, and many were the painful thoughts and conjectures it

excited in her bosom. Surely letter after letter could not have miscarried, and to what cause then could she attribute their silence? Did they really suspect the rectitude of her conduct, and blame her for the course she had pursued? or did they doubt whether she was really the wife of Lord Selborne? The thought that they might do so distracted her.

And then poor Henry Ashford, whose fond hopes she had destroyed, whom she had so cruelly deceived, and abandoned to despair; what must he think of her? Could he now do otherwise than hate and despise her? It was impossible that he could; and many a wretched hour, amidst all the pleasures, the luxury, and splendour by which she was surrounded, did those reflections cause her.

Lord Selborne tried all he could to dissipate her fears, and quiet her uneasiness, but

he found it a difficult task to do so, and his conscience frequently reproached him for the deceptive part he was acting towards her.

In this manner two or three months wore away without anything of sufficient importance taking place to be worthy of recording, when an event happened which was the cause of the greatest anguish to our heroine, and which we will proceed at once to relate.

It was the anniversary of his lordship's birth-day, and great preparations had been for some time making to celebrate it with great splendour and festivity for three successive days, invitations having been sent to many of the greatest fashionables then in town, and ample provision being also made for the pleasure and enjoyment of the domestics and their humble relations and friends.

Phoebe was fully prepared to enter into all the sports and pastimes of that joyous occasion, with becoming spirit and vivacity, and she looked forward to it with the most eager impatience, and cheerful anticipation.

Among other entertainments, it had been resolved by his lordship to get up a *bal masque*, which he thought would prove a novelty, and likewise a source of great delight to his aristocratic guests. To Phoebe he was convinced it would be both amusing and surprising, as she had never yet witnessed such a scene, and could form but a slight conception of what it was.

The spacious saloon in the mansion was fitted up with much magnificence, and nothing could possibly be more tasteful and appropriate than the general arrangements.

It was splendidly lighted by large and elegant chandeliers and candelabre, and the walls and pillars that supported the handsome ceiling were decorated with festoons of beautiful flowers, which gave it a striking and fairy-like effect.

On richly and elaborately executed pedestals of stained glass, at intervals, were handsome vases filled with the choicest exotics, and at the further end of the saloon were two finely painted portraits, side by side, one of his lordship, and the other of our heroine. These were surmounted by a canopy, tastefully formed of artificial flowers under which was a platform, covered with a splendid *dais*, and on which were placed two chairs of state, for Lord Selborne and Phoebe, where, tired of joining in the sports, they could seat themselves, and at the same time have an uninterrupted view of the whole extent of the saloon, and the novel and animating scene.

There was a commodious gallery and orchestra for the musicians, of whom a number of the most talented then in town were

engaged for the joyous occasion. Large mirrors caught the eye at every turn, reflecting back the scene in a variety of ways. In fact, all that money could command, or artistic skill accomplish, was there lavishly displayed, and could not but excite the wonder and admiration of every visitor.

Some time before the assembling of the numerous guests invited, our heroine, accompanied by Mrs. Grace Wildlove, his lordship and Captain Beaufort, walked round the magnificent saloon, in order to inspect the extensive preparations, and she could not find language sufficiently powerful to express her astonishment and delight at all she saw. It was indeed a novelty of the most attractive and pleasing description to her; and Lord Selborne congratulated himself on the success of his efforts to afford her amusement.

Phoebe wore a simple gray domino, with a mask, as did also Lord Selborne, but Captain Beaufort appeared in the rather appropriate character of the libertine, Don Giovanni, while the Widow Wildlove made rather too liberal a display of her personal charms—in the simple opinion of Phoebe—as a madcap girl from boarding school.

As the numerous guests arrived, our heroine gazed with increased wonder and pleasure, and her brain turned almost giddy at the endless variety of characters that met her sight, turn in whatever direction she might.

It seemed to her that every country on the face of the globe was represented there, and all the gods and goddesses of the Heathen Mythology, and the spirits of good and evil, of the earth and the air, of things terrestrial and celestial likewise. There were Sylphs and Satyrs, Fays and Fairies, Sprites and Demons, nameless monsters "which the world ne'er saw," Arcadian Nymphs, and Shepherds and Shepherdesses—Venus's out of number, with Adonis's, Psyche's, Cupid's, Apollo's, Vulcan's, &c., to match.

Then there were wizards and witches, monks and monkeys, clowns, collumbines, harlequins and pantaloons, giants and dwarfs, brigands and bravo's, gay Lothario's and lovesick belles, dukes and dustmen, sweeps and sovereigns, grand Turks and miserable beggars, in fact almost every character that could be imagined, national and irrational, natural and supernatural was there portrayed with more or less ability; and jokes, and inuendo's old and new, some of them not over remarkable for their delicacy or morality, were freely bandied about from one to another, and mirth and laughter were allowed full license.

Then the lively strains of the music, and the effect of the different fancy dresses of the innumerable characters, as they moved

through the mazes of the sprightly dance, was almost bewildering, and Phoebe walked about, and looked on, with feelings such as she had never before experienced.

Having become separated from Lord Selborne and the widow, our heroine felt somewhat embarrassed in the midst of the motley throng, and knew not how to reply to the different witty and jocular observations that were made to her; but still she rambled about, enjoying the lively scene, and endeavoured to make herself more at ease.

Among the numerous characters, there was one which more particularly attracted the attention of our heroine than any of the rest; not that there was anything novel or remarkable about it, but because it seemed to take particular notice of her, and when she was separated from Lord Selborne and the widow, followed her about to whatever part of the saloon she went, and was at her elbow at every turn, much to her surprise and confusion.

It was a man dressed in rustic costume, and wearing a half mask, which was just sufficient to conceal his features.

His form was manly, and well proportioned, and there was something about it, which was strangely, and even painfully familiar to our heroine; though why the idea should cause her any emotion she could not imagine.

She tried to avoid this individual, and to seek out Lord Selborne and her friends, but in vain, the countryman was still constantly by her side, and seemed determined that she should not escape him or shun him.

At length when she had reached a part of the saloon where but few of the revellers were assembled, he suddenly seized her firmly by the wrist, and, in a voice, the tones of which made her tremble with emotion, and struck terror to her breast he said, but so low, that no one but herself could hear him.

"Deceiver, deceived, fallen and degraded, you move about a gaudy sham, a wretched mockery, as you will ere long be openly despised, and deserted. The dream of the miserable victim of vice will soon be o'er, and terrible will be the stern reality to which she will be awakened. Remember him you have so cruelly deceived, those aged parents you have so heartlessly abandoned, the life of virtue you have forsaken, the fond, confiding hearts you have wrung and broken, and tremble. Oh, beware, poor wandering, friendless outcast, as ere long you will be, beware!"

It would be impossible to describe the astonishment and alarm of Phoebe, as she listened to these fearful words, and the voice in which they were spoken. At the moment

her mask, by some means became unfastened, and fell off; the stranger at the same time raised his, and fixed his gaze earnestly and reproachfully upon her. But, gracious Heaven! whose features were revealed to the appalled and distracted sight of Phoebe?

They were those of the fond, and faithful, but ill-used and rejected Henry Ashford.

Our heroine was transfixed to the spot with surprise and terror, and gazed wildly and vacantly upon him unable to utter a word. But at length a faint cry escaped her lips, Henry relinquished his hold of her arm, and in an instant disappeared among the gay throng, and Phoebe sunk senseless in the arms of Lord Selborne, who had been seeking for her, and who at that moment arrived at the spot, accompanied by the widow and Captain Beaufort.

This extraordinary event, caused quite a sensation among the numerous persons assembled, who gathered round to endeavour to ascertain the cause. Lord Selborne, however, was in as profound a state of mystery as themselves, and was greatly alarmed; for he had not caught sight of the retreating form of Henry Ashford, and had therefore no means of even conjecturing the cause of Phoebe's agitation.

Excusing himself to his guests, and desiring them to continue their amusements undisturbed, he conveyed the inanimate form of our heroine from the saloon, to a private apartment, followed by the Widow Wildlove, who was as much astonished, and as anxious as himself; and there summoning the attendance of her maid, Fanny, every means were immediately taken to restore her to sensibility.

It was some time, however, ere she showed the least symptoms of recovery, and then seemed to be unconscious of where she was, or who were present; but suddenly fixing her eyes upon Lord Selborne, she uttered an exclamation of emotion, and recoiled from him with looks of horror.

Lord Selborne was lost in amazement and confusion, and the surprise of the widow was as great as his own. But all that they could elicit from her for some time, were ambiguous words, which they were unable to understand.

At length, however, her recollection did in some measure seem to return to her, and they gathered sufficient from her half wild and incoherent observations to form some idea of the circumstance which had caused her alarm; and their apprehensions and confusion, particularly those of Lord Selborne, were consequently greatly increased.

But when poor Phoebe mentioned the name of Henry Ashford, and freely hinted the nature of the fearful and ominous words

he had addressed to her, the agitation of his lordship was so great that he could with difficulty avoid betraying himself.

Our heroine, after a violent struggle with her feelings, during which she accused Lord Selborne with betraying her, and heaped the most bitter reproaches on his head, relapsed into a state of insensibility, and was thus conveyed by the widow and Fanny to her chamber, and there placed in bed.

The entertainments were brought to an abrupt termination, the guests slowly retired, much disappointed, and silence succeeded the sounds of mirth and revelry that had lately been heard in Selborne House.

CHAPTER XXII.

A LAPSE OF TWO YEARS.—A MELANCHOLY CHANGE.—THE POOR SEAMSTRESS

It now suits the purposes of our story to pass hastily over an interval of two years.

It was the memorable year of the hard frost, 1814, and severe indeed were the sufferings and privations of the poor.

In spite of what old prejudiced people may say about the advantages of "the good old times," those good old times of war and bloodshed, of tyranny and oppression, of "star chambers," and blood-money, in fact, of villany of every description, when George the Third "of blessed memory," was king, it is a stupid, false, and monstrous exaggeration, we are old enough, and sufficiently experienced to be able to answer for the truth of these assertions.

If labour was plentiful, and the rate of wages higher than at the present time, every article of consumption was at starvation price taxation was enormous and insufferable, corruption, and robbery of the industrious classes in every department of the state, and it was only because it was prior to the advent of the "March of Intellect," and the minds of "the lower orders," were kept in the most brutal state of ignorance, or they would have discovered that their condition was really no better, if it were not absolutely worse, than that of the serfs of Russia, or any other nation of barbarians.

But to our tale.

The latter end of 1813, and commencement of 1814, is well known to have been one of the severest winters this country has ever experienced. The cold was most intense, and the frost continued, we believe without intermission during a period of thirteen weeks; and being of that extraordinary character, that the Thames was frozen over to a certain extent; so much so that a fair

was actually held upon it where all kinds of entertainments took place, tents were erected bullocks roasted whole on the ice, and thousands of people congregated, without any fear of danger.

Great changes had taken place in the circumstances, and remarkable events occurred to the principal characters in our tale, during this interval of two years, which we shall not now stop to relate, but request the reader to accompany us to a miserable bye-street in the neighbourhood of Bermondsey; a place the very aspect of which denoted the squalid poverty and wretched state of the individuals who dragged out a dreary existence within its filthy purlieus.

The afternoon of one of the severest days of the frost was somewhat advanced, when Lord Selborne, who looked gloomy and thoughtful, accompanied by his old associate, Captain Beaufort, entered this dirty, narrow street, though what purpose had brought them into that anti-aristocratic neighbourhood, we know not. They were deeply engaged in conversation, but his lordship seemed by no means to agree with his companion.

"What preposterous folly is this, my lord," observed Beaufort; "positively I must laugh you out of it. Come, come, you must accompany me. There will be rare life and gaiety at Frost Fair, on the Thames, sparkling eyes and ruby lips to welcome, merry hearts and jovial souls to greet us, sports and pastimes in endless variety. And then, only consider the novelty of the scene. Now, really Selborne, you cannot refuse, I will not listen to any apology."

"Do not urge me, Beaufort," replied the nobleman; "I would return home without delay, for I am in no humour for mirth. Phoebe will be uneasy at my long absence, and your gay inamorator, the charming young Widow Wildlove, my *soi disant* cousin, will also be expecting your return."

"A plague on the Widow Wildlove," returned the captain, petulantly; "she was very well for a season, but she has become an expensive burthen to me now, which I must rid myself of as soon as possible. Positively I must have a change. And you, my dear fellow, must really begin to tire of your rustic beauty, who, in spite of the pomp and luxury in which you have hitherto supported her, is at times, provokingly dull and sentimental, reproaching herself and you for abandoning her old parents, and that rustic clown, Henry Ashford. You must send her adrift, I say again, or you will become the laughingstock of the whole fashionable world."

"Abandon the poor confiding girl, whom I have already so deeply, wronged, to the scorn, neglect, and contumely of the world,"

exclaimed his lordship, with a feeling of remorse; "no, Beaufort, I may be a villain, but—"

"A villain, my lord?" repeated the captain, with a look of surprise.

"Aye, was it not the act of a villain," said the nobleman, "the act of a heartless villain, to lure from her happy home of rustic simplicity, one so fair, so pure, so good and innocent? To impose upon her by a false marriage, and—"

"Don't make too sure of that," muttered Beaufort to himself aside, and he then added aloud; "Psha, my lord, you must not give way to this egregious folly. Now, are you really vain or silly enough to suppose that you possess the undivided affections and favours of Lady Selborne, as you have allowed her to call herself?"

"Ah! what would you insinuate?"—"Hark ye—Henry Ashford, and his sister, under the assumed name of Travers, have been in London some time. Think you that Phoebe is a stranger to that fact?"

"Hold, Beaufort," exclaimed Lord Selborne, much excited, "what torturing thoughts and suspicions would you excite in my mind? If I believed that Phoebe dared to deceive me, I would spurn her, cast her from me with scorn and hatred. But no, I am a fool to give any encouragement, even for a moment to such an idea. Let me be gone. Nay, do not seek to detain me, Beaufort. Good day."

With these words the young nobleman hurried on his return to his mansion, and left the reckless and dissipated Captain Beaufort to visit the fair on the Thames by himself.

"Poor fellow," he observed, when his lordship was gone; "this little rustic beauty has certainly obtained a most powerful ascendancy over him, and which it must be my task to endeavour to destroy, for I have other game for him to pursue. Did he but know the real position in which he stands, he would be filled with confusion and dismay. 'Tis well, I will not fail to take advantage of the knowledge I possess, for my own profit. Now to business which more immediately concerns me. This is the street, and yonder is the house where Henry Ashford and his sister reside, Amy has excited a passion in my breast which I am determined to gratify. Henry must be quietly disposed of, and—"

"And if yer wants anybody to assist yer in the b'sness, guv'nor," interrupted a voice close behind him; "Sam Filcher's the boy for yer money, and not no mistake."

Captain Beaufort turned hastily round on hearing these words, and certainly the individual his eyes encountered was far from prepossessing.

It was a reckless, flash-looking ruffian,

with a tremendous black eye, dirty, and ragged, and carrying a dangerous and suspicious-looking stick in his hand.

"And who and what the devil are you?" haughtily demanded the captain.

"Vhy," replied the fellow, with an impudent grin; "I'm a gen'leman's son in disguise. These here are not my best toggs, but my travellin' suit, light and airy. Not exactly fit for the hop'ra or *Hallmacks*, perhaps. You and I is old *partickler's*, Captain Beaufort. Ve've been in ev'ry prison in London."

"Rascal!" said the captain, indignantly, "I never was but in one prison in my life, the King's Bench."

"Wot's the odds!" said the man, "ar'n't I been in all the to'thers?"

"This is a desperate scoundrel, I'll warrant," said Beaufort aside, "I may need his assistance. Upon word I feel highly honoured by your friendship;" he added, aloud.

"There, don't take yer hat off," said the impudent scamp; "that here's a mark of respect I only looks for in public company. Lor' love yer, don't yer recollect Sam Filcher, the sprig of myrtle, and the pride of *Vest-minister*? You and I have passed many a happy hour together in the Fives Court. Vy, you vos von o' my principal backers when I *fit* the celebrated Hookem Snivey, the Game Bantam, and the pet of Chick Lane. I polished him off like smoke in fourteen rounds, forty minits, eighteen seconds and a half, and came out of the ring smiling."

The recollection of this interesting and gallant achievement seemed to afford Mr. Filcher much inward pride and satisfaction.

"Oh," remarked the captain, with a smile, "I remember you now well, Mr. Filcher, I'm sorry to see a gentleman of your respectable profession so reduced in circumstances. How do you weather it, eh?"

"Oh, wery quizzy, captain, wery," replied Sam; "yer see, I'm no use in the ring now. I'm lick'd out of time, and sent to grass. So, as I'm nat'rally of an industr'ous *natur*', I turns my hand to anything, and that sometimes gets me three months board and lodging free gratist for nuffin, and that's not to be sneezed at when a cove's hard up."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Captain Beaufort; "poor devil!"

"But I overheard you say, captain," continued Filcher, "summat about a bit of b'sness just now, and if I can be of any use to yer, yer may command my valuable services."

"Humph! but can I trust you?"

"Oh, honour, honour, only come down han'some, and I'll stick to yer like bricks."

"Well, I will trust you. Here are a few

ponds for the present. Play your part well, and I will handsomely reward you."

"Wot!" exclaimed Sam Filcher, joyfully taking the purse; "the *sugar*, I'm in luck."

"Psha!" returned the captain, impatiently; "to business. You see yon house, or hovel?"

"In course I does," answered Sam: "why Hareskin Joe used to hang out there; but he's gone abroad for change of air, the benefit of his health and the good of his country. Then there was Dick Dodger—"

"Enough. Henry Ashford and his sister, under the name of Travers, now resides there."

"Wot! the young 'oman as makes shirts for seven farthings each, and finds her own needles and thread? Have you taken a fancy to her, captain, eh?"

"True, but her brother stands in the way; he must be removed."

"In course he must," coincided the ruffian, "and Sam Filcher's the very chap as can do it. I lends a hand to the press gang now and then, so they'll take care of him, eh?"

"A capital thought. Meet me to-night, and—"

At that moment the door of the house which Beaufort had indicated was seen slowly to open, and he whispered to his vagabond companion—

"Soft—some one comes—let us aside, and watch."

They cautiously retired accordingly, and poor Amy Ashford, with a small bundle tied up in a handkerchief, issued into the street.

Her face was pale, and bespoke care and suffering, and her dress was mean, but with all that cleanly neatness which had ever characterised her. Poverty sorely tried the poor seamstress and her brother, and great were the sufferings and privations they had had to endure, since they had resided in London; and now on that bitter cold seventh of January, 1814—the day on which the memorable fair on the Thames was held—they were both without a morsel of food.

Amy faltered on the threshold, and looked with a shudder into the cold and dreary street.

"I'm faint and exhausted," she said, "and I fear my trembling limbs will scarcely support me to the end of my journey. I have not tasted anything but a cup of tea and a crust of bread since yesterday. My poor brother, too, has been absent from our wretched home for hours, in the hopeless search for employment. Oh, when will this torturing life of misery and privation have an end. But I will not murmur, I will struggle on for my dear brother's sake. While I have strength to work, I will never—never desert him. But time flies. I must

begone, or my unfeeling employer will refuse to pay me the scanty pittance I have earned."

Thus saying, the poor seamstress exerted all her feeble energies, and proceeded on her cheerless journey, and Captain Beaufort and Filcher again came forward.

"By Jove," said the former, "it is an excellent opportunity. Follow me at a distance, Filcher."

"All right, captain," replied Sam, obeying him, "I'm yer man."

Night was approaching by the time Amy Ashford reached the place of her destination, whither Beaufort and his vagabond companion followed her at a short distance, and determined not to interrupt her till she had arrived at a convenient spot on her return home.

Anxious to reach her miserable dwelling, and expecting that her brother had by that time returned, Amy quickened her pace, and Beaufort, fearing that in the darkness she might yet elude them, called on her to stop; surprised, she looked back, and felt considerable alarm on observing that she was thus pursued, though for what purpose she was at a loss to conjecture.

Beaufort again called on her to stop, and now more alarmed than ever, Amy redoubled her speed, and fled, without noticing the direction, as fast as her limbs could carry her.

By a strange accident, she suddenly found herself in the very midst of the fair upon the Thames, and although its noise and confusion was in anything but unison with her present feelings, she hailed it with satisfaction, inasmuch as she might escape from her pursuers among the crowd.

It was a most novel and remarkable scene, and those who saw it could scarcely well forget it. There were tents on the ice, and roundabouts, and different amusements in abundance; and innumerable skaters and spectators, and the noisy mirth which prevailed on all sides was truly bewildering.

Amy, however, had not proceeded far, when Beaufort and Filcher overtook her, and terrified, she clung to an itinerant pieman, who happened to be nearest to her, and implored his protection, and then to her astonishment she discovered that it was her old friend, the simple, but kind hearted rustic, Giles Stubbles.

"What provoking coyness and timidity," said the captain, rudely seizing her, and trying to force her from the protection of Giles; "I declare you are a perfect icicle, beauteous Amy; but I am too old and experienced a general to beat a retreat on the first charge, and, positively, I will never raise the siege till you surrender."

"Bravo, captain," exclaimed Filcher, "nuffin like a bold attack. Now young 'oman, it's not no use o' yer a pertendin' to be so wery bashful. 'Twont do, It's all gammon!"

"Shut up, Mister Hanggallows," said a purveyor of sweatmeats, who was standing by, "or I'll ram my stock, basket and all, down your throat."

This individual was no other than our old acquaintance, honest Bob Bristles, the village cobbler and politician. A fierce engagement immediately ensued between him and Sam Filcher.

"Well done, Bob," cried Giles, "give it him; and I'll soon tame this swell, or my name's not Giles Stubbles."

The daring libertine, however, still persisted, and retained his hold of poor Amy, in spite of the efforts of the honest Giles Stubbles to release her.

The battle was continued between Sam Filcher and Bob Bristles, with pretty equal skill and courage on both sides, and much to the amusement of the spectators, who stimulated them to increased valour by an occasional snow-ball.

"Villain! brutal, cowardly villain, unhand me!" exclaimed Amy, struggling.

"Nay," returned Captain Beaufort, forcing her towards one of the tents; "I will not be foiled—I am determined."

The words, however, had scarcely escaped his lips, when he was stretched senseless on the ice by a violent blow, and Amy, with an exclamation of joy and gratitude, found herself clasped in the arms of her brother

rescue. But I'll have revenge, and that too this very night, if you only remain faithful to your promises, Filcher."

"Oh, trust me, captain," replied Sam, "only let me get a pot or two o' purl into me, and I and the press gang will wait upon Master Ashford this very night. The young 'oman vill then be at your disposal, eh?"

"True," coincided Beaufort, "let not a moment be lost, for I am all impatience till the plot is fully accomplished. You will be sure to find Henry Ashford at home, and then you know what to do."

"All right, captain: that's settled."

The sound of voices and approaching footsteps now smote their ears, and the captain looking eagerly in the direction from whence they proceeded, said—

"Ah, they are close upon us. Come, Filcher, let us begone. It would not be prudent to re-encounter them at present."

"Agreed," said Sam, and they made a hasty retreat as Giles Stubbles and Henry Ashford and his sister entered the street.

"Come along, Amy," said Giles, "and don't be alarmed, for I and your brother will protect you from all danger. Oh, I only wish my Patty, Mrs. Giles Stubbles as is now, could only see you. But you must come with me to our flourishing establishment, the noted fried fish-shop and eel-pie house, Frying-pan Alley, Bermondsey, where you will find my dear little Patty, bless her heart, up to her elbows in grease and pastry."

Amy and her brother could not help smiling at the good humoured observations of honest Giles, who was indeed a true diamond in the rough.

"Oh, how warmly do I thank you, my kind friend," said Amy, "for the service you have rendered me. Ah, Harry," she added, with a sigh, "was it not enough that I should have to endure all the bitter pangs of poverty, but that I must be subjected to the unmanly insults of this abandoned profligate?"

"The smameless scoundrel," exclaimed the indignant Henry, "to dare to raise a blush upon your cheek, my sister. He, the abandoned associate of the accursed Lord Selborne, the destroyer of Phoebe Mayfield, the murderer of her poor old mother, and of the happiness of her aged father. The villain who has annihilated all my hopes, and laid desolate my heart for ever. May curses, bitter curses pursue him, and the deceitful, heartless, wanton girl, who—"

"Forbear—forbear, Harry," interrupted his sister, shocked at his words, and the warmth of his manner, "invoke not curses on the head of the unfortunate girl, whose too confiding innocence alone made her the

CHAPTER XXIII.

OLD FRIENDS.—EVIL DESIGNS.

Mr. Sam Filcher was at length compelled to yield to the superior pugilistic skill of his antagonist, and arousing Beaufort from the temporary stupor into which the blow he had received from Henry threw him, they skulked off wofully chopfallen, and amidst the laughter and derision of the bystanders.

"I say, captain," observed Filcher, as they entered one of the back streets on their retreat, "I fancy we've got the worst of this round. That brandy-ball merchant knows how to use his mawleys. Here's a pickle I'm in; a nice day this to take a cold bath. Blessed if I am't one walking awalanch of ice."

"Confound this defeat," said the captain, angrily, "the obstinate little rustic, too, to dare to resist my importunities. And then to think her brother should come to the

victim of the base libertine's insidious designs."

"Ah, poor thing," said Giles, "it was not so much her fault as that of that rich lord. But, bless you, Phoebe is such a fine lady now, and rides about in her carriage, with two tall footmen behind it, and I don't suppose she would know poor people now she's Lady Selborne."

"Lady Selborne," repeated Henry, bitterly, "oh, what mockery is there in that title to which she has no claim. I tell you she is ruined, lost, degraded. Phoebe Mayfield, the good, the innocent, the village pride, who won all hearts and shed happiness around her wherever she appeared is no more, that which once was fair and lovely is now hateful and disgusting, she is a poor lost wretch, a wanton—"

"Hold, Harry, I beseech you," said his sister, "Phoebe Mayfield, can never deserve the cruel epithets you have applied to her."

"She does, she will, and more," replied Henry warmly, "she is already on the downward path to ruin, and clearly can I read the terrible fate which is in store for her. I see the beauteous flower, worn for awhile, and basking in the sunshine of flattery, than cast scornfully aside, and left to wither and decay."

"Come, come, Master Harry," interposed Giles, "don't go on in that manner. But have you seen anything of her since you have been in London this last time?"

"Seen her," reiterated Henry, "no, though with a heavy throbbing heart I have watched for hours around the princely mansion where in glittering pomp she resides, the guilty mistress of her base betrayer. Unable longer to restrain the honest expression of my feelings, I have written a letter to her, in which I have detailed all the sorrow and misery and breaking hearts her guilty conduct has been the cause of, and, if her own heart be not formed of marble, of adamant, it will break, and she will hide her shame and degradation in the silent grave."

"Alas, dear Harry," said Amy, "would that a sister's voice could soothe your anguish."

"Poor fellow," said Giles, aside, "well, I don't wonder at his taking on so, for, I'm sure, if my wife, Mrs. Giles Stubbles, had gone and done as Phoebe Mayfield has done, I—I—I should have committed *bigamy*; or else *burglary*. I don't know what I should have done, but I'm sure it would have been some such desperate act of *manslaughter*."

At that moment Patty was heard singing without, and arriving at the spot her and Giles greeted each other very affectionately.

"There were no customers to the shop to-day, Giles," said Patty, "so I made myself

smart, locked up our establishment, and thought I'd come and meet you at the fair."

"To be sure, Patty; but—but—"

"La, Giles, what's the matter with you? I hope you haven't been taking a glass too much with your old friend, Bob Bristles. What are you nudging me for?"

"Won't you be surprised?"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you see?"

"No, I don't."

"Then why don't you look?"

"Well I am a looking," answered Patty, and what is there to look at? I see nothing but a man and woman."

She, however, approached Henry and his sister nearer, and then, much to her pleasure and astonishment, she recognised them.

"Eh—what—la!—oh, my," she ejaculated, "am I awake? is it possible?—can it be?—well I never—yes—no—yes, oh, good gracious! if it ain't Miss Amy Ashford and her brother Henry! I'm so glad to see you. And—and—I'm so pleased; and—and I'm so delighted; and—and—oh, dear, I'm in such a fluster; la, bless me, who'd ha' thought it?"

And the poor, simple, good-natured creature, was so overwhelmed by the exuberance of her feelings, that she wept and cried together in a breath.

"Oh, dear," she at length continued, "only to think that you should have come all the way from Yorkshire, I dare say now, on purpose to see me and my dear Giles. How are you?—how have you been?—how be all the folk at home? My old master, Roger Swillet, Hodge Ploughshare, and poor old Mark Mayfield. The village parson, and Mobbs the beadle—Farmer Dobbins and his old mare, Peggy?—and the old sow, and the squeakers?—and Molly, the cow, and the donkey as they named out o' compliment to my Giles?—and the ducks and the drakes, and all the other thingymyobs? Be the squire alive yet? Have they removed the parish stocks and built the new alm-houses? Did they have a good harvest, and has the old house as was in Chancery tumbled down yet? Has Dorothy Dingle got any more children?—and—and—"

"Stop—stop, Patty," interrupted Giles, "you'll drive 'em crazy with all these questions."

"I never knew such a man in my life," said the loquacious Patty, "he won't let me get in a word hedgeways."

"Miss Amy and her brother will go home to our flourishing establishment, to be sure," observed Giles, "and then they can tell us all about it, you know."

"Yes," resumed his wife, breathlessly shaking them both by the hand at the same



time; "you'll accompany us, won't you? The noted eel-pie house and fried fish establishment, *Frying-pan Alley*, *Bermondsey* Lor' bless you, it's a perfect palace. And we'll make you so comfortable, such a nice cup of tea, and a beautiful supper of fried fish afterwards. Why we're making our fortunes there rapidly. I makes the fires, fries the fish, *Giles* sells 'em, and everybody eats 'em. And we've paid all the rent up to last quarter day—and we've got twenty pounds in the *West Diddlesex Savings' Bank*—and we've got drawers full, and drawers full of clothes; and we goes out on a Sunday like the first lord and lady in the land. And *Giles* gave his vote at the last election, and was styled *Mister Giles Stubbles Esquire*, in the circular they sent round, wasn't you, *Giles*?"

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"What a clack!" said *Giles*; and he hurried her and their old friends away towards their dwelling.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FATAL LETTER.—THE FEARFUL DISCOVERY.

We will now, on the same eventful evening, request the reader to accompany us to the mansion of *Lord Selborne*, in *St. James's Square*, where, in one of the most splendid apartments of that proud establishment, *Maggie Minx*—as she was somewhat facetiously called—the pert lady's maid who had superseded *Fanny*, was arranging and dust-

ing furniture, and fancying herself much fatigued at the same time.

"Faugh!" she exclaimed, with a look of disgust, "what a perfect slave I'm making of myself. I wonder if this apartment will suit her ladyship? Her ladyship; a pretty lady indeed. Poor silly thing, to fancy that my lord has really been foolish enough to make such a low-bred, vulgar, ignorant, country rustic as she is, his lawful wife. Ah, she'll wake from her dream one of these days, and— But, bless me, here she comes."

Our heroine, elegantly attired, but looking pale, anxious, and melancholy, now entered the room, and Maggy eyed her aside with looks of envy and contempt.

"Has his lordship yet returned, Maggy?" inquired Phoebe.

"No, miss—ma'am—that is, my lady, I mean. A pretty lady, indeed!" she added, aside.

"Still absent," sighed Phoebe, to herself. "Day after day away from home. 'Tis surely strange neglect. His growing coldness alarms me, and fills my mind with torturing doubts and suspicions. Retire, Maggy," she added, aloud, "I do not require your attendance."

"Oh, certainly, ma'am, that is, my lady," replied the girl, insolently. "I never like to intrude where I'm not welcome. How disgusting it is," she muttered to herself, "to have to humble oneself to one's inferiors. Faugh! what a vulgar fright she looks in all her finery."

"Did you hear me, Maggy?" mildly inquired our heroine.

"Oh yes," returned the saucy maid; "I'm sure I beg your ladyship's pardon."

And thus saying, she tossed herself indignantly out of the room.

"The boldness of that girl," said Phoebe, to herself, when Maggy was gone, "at times annoys me. Daily am I subjected to some fresh disappointment. The bright hopes I had so fondly cherished, decay and vanish. I feel sad and lonely in the midst of this world of gaiety and splendour. Dread forebodings haunt my mind, and I shudder with a nameless feeling of terror to anticipate the future. Yet, why is this? Am I not raised to rank and fortune?—have I not every luxury at my command?—am I not Lady Selborne? Ah! again that terrible, that unaccountable feeling of dread and suspicion, thrills through my veins, and mocking laughter seems ringing in mine ears at the mention of that proud title. Oh, that I were again the simple, artless village maiden, the merry, happy Phoebe Mayfield, whose humble friends e'er met her with the sunny smiles of love and welcome."

Her emotions for a time were too much

for her, and with deep sighs, and tears trembling in her eyes, she sunk in a chair.

She was quickly aroused, however, by the voice of Mrs. Grace Wildlove, outside, thus speaking to Maggy—

"That will do, girl; there, there, don't be impertinently obtrusive. If there is one thing more than another that I abominate, it is the odious officiousness of menials. There, there, don't presume to answer me. I have said the word—enough—begone."

With these words, the gay young widow, attired in the very height and extravagance of fashion, stepped lightly into the room.

"The impertinent civility of that domestic has really quite unnerved me," she said, affectedly. "The exquisite delicacy of my constitution cannot combat with these annoyances. Ah, my dear Lady Selborne, I'm so delighted to see you, and looking so charming. You must certainly, ere long, have a host of admirers at your feet."

"Admirers, madam," repeated Phoebe, with a look of surprise; "oh, think you that any other man can share my affections with my dear Selborne?"

"Why, what a consummate little novice in the ways of fashionable life you are, my dear," said the widow, laughing. "Think you that Lord Selborne is the real Simon Pure that you take him to be? Strange delusion. Beaufort and I know better, and therefore we allow each other perfect liberty of action. You should mingle more in gay and fashionable society, without his lordship's company, than you do. *Apropos*, my dear Lady Selborne, I anticipate a delightful evening's entertainment at the mansion of Lord and Lady Montpelier Gossamer, in Pall Mall. They give a grand *bal al fresco* and *soiree dansante*. So, my dear Lady Selborne, *en passant*, I thought I would call upon you, knowing that his lordship and Captain Beaufort, being otherwise engaged, could dispense with our company; and really you must take a seat in my carriage, and accompany me to Montpelier House, for all the *elite* of the world of beauty and fashion will be there."

"Oh, no," returned Phoebe, shocked at the levity of the widow, and anxious for her to depart; "I dare not; you must excuse me, my dear madam, I am in no humour for noisy scenes of mirth and revelry. My spirits are depressed—sad thoughts crowd upon my brain, and—"

"Now positively you are a most provoking little creature, to give way to those fits of ennui and regret," remarked the widow. "Why are you constantly thinking of those dull, insipid, monotonous rustic scenes from which his lordship was so kind as to withdraw you? It is so excessively vulgar and

common-place to remember anything of home and old associations."

"Oh," ejaculated Phoebe, with a look of surprise and deep emotion, "think you I can e'er forget those peaceful, lovely scenes in which my childhood's happy days were passed? The humble cot where first I drew the breath of life, with its homely hearth and its scanty furniture so neatly arranged; with the sweet honeysuckles climbing the old fashioned casement. Methinks e'en now I hear the ticking of the old clock, as on that fatal evening when I abandoned all, all for Selborne. Again I behold my dear father, with his silvery hair, and happy cheerful countenance, sitting in his old arm chair, after his day's hard toil, smoking his pipe, and listening to the good humoured voice of that mild and gentle mother, who—"

The violence of her feelings chooked her utterance, and she could not finish the sentence.

"Silly girl," said the widow, "to trouble yourself about such ridiculous trifles. Well, I suppose I must yield to your humour; so *adio, adio*, as the Italians say. I will remember you to Lord Selborne, should he happen to be one of our happy party. *Adio, adio, mon belle souci.*"

Thus saying, much to the relief of our heroine, the vain flirt took her departure.

"What can her words imply?" soliloquised Phoebe, when she was gone; "there was a levity in her manners, and a mystery in her observations which I do not understand, and which increases the anguish of my doubts and fears. Can Selborne have deceived me? He promised to restore me to my parents, yet two years have elapsed, and he has failed to do so; and all the letters I have written to them remain unanswered. Ah! what terrible thoughts and suspicions are those that flash upon my brain?"

She was interrupted by the re-entrance of Maggy.

"Here's a letter, madam, my lady I mean," she said; "the postman has just brought you. The direction is written in such a funny round hand, it is wafered in three places, and stamped with a tobacco-stopper."

"Ah!" exclaimed Phoebe, eagerly, "a letter, and for me? Can it at last be from my dear parents? Give it me, girl."

"Oh, certainly, my lady," replied Maggy, insolently, "of course, as it's addressed to you I don't want to keep it. Give it me, girl—*girl!*," she repeated to herself, as she bounded in high dudgeon out of the room, "well, I'm sure, what impertinence. *Girl!* where will she find her women, I should like to know."

"My heart throbs, and my limbs tremble," said Phoebe, as she held the letter in her

hand; "a mist seems to gather before mine eyes, and I cannot see to decipher the superscription. What nameless dread is it which agitates me thus? Ah! what strange characters are these? 'Tis not the hand-writing of my mother, and yet I have surely seen it before."

With difficulty and panting breath she read the direction in the following words:

"To Miss Phoebe Mayfield, alias Lady Selborne."

"'Tis—'tis from poor Henry Ashford," she sighed; "oh, agony, I dare not, cannot open it. I feel that its contents breath horror and despair."

She clasped her forehead, and staggered to a chair by the table.

"And yet, foolish girl that I am," she said, after a pause; "to give way to this weakness, when the letter may bring me happy news of my dear parents. At least let me steel my heart to read the curses and reproaches of the much wronged Henry Ashford."

With throbbing heart she unfolded the letter, and with convulsive emotion read the following words:

"Wretched girl, you are betrayed, your cruel desertion broke your poor old mother's heart, she *died*, and—"

The letter fell from her hand, and with an indescribable burst of agony she exclaimed:

"Horror! horror! the fatal spell is broken, my dreadful forebodings are realised; guilty wretched being, I am my mother's murderer!"

Unable to withstand the terrible shock, she became insensible, and just at that critical moment Lord Selborne hastily entered the room.

"Surely I heard Phoebe's voice," he said, looking round the room; "ah!" he added, as he discovered her, "she is there, apparently lost in painful thought. Phoebe."

He approached her.

"She hears me not," he remarked, with surprise; "she is insensible. What can this mean? Dark thoughts and suspicions crowd upon my mind, and—"

At that moment, he saw the open letter lying on the floor, as it had fallen from her hand, and he hastily picked it up.

"Ah!" he said, "a letter, and in a man's hand-writing; it is from my rival. He addresses her in his old familiar style. False one! then the suspicions of Captain Beaufort are confirmed, Phoebe is keeping up a secret and criminal correspondence with the rustic, Henry Ashford. Phoebe Mayfield," he added, aloud; "abandoned woman, arouse from your guilty dream, and meet, if you can my stern reproaches."

"What fearful voice was that?" said Phoebe, starting from her seat, and gazing

bewildered around her; "what fearful voice was that which called anger on my name? Surely 'twas my father's, or else some hideous dream has—ah, dear Selborne, you have then returned, and—but no; she continued, suddenly recollecting herself, and recoiling from him, "I dare not approach, or embrace you; my murdered mother's ghastly shade seems to interpose between us. Away, heartless deceiver, away!"

"Phoebe Mayfield," returned his lordship, sternly; "your words fall harmless on mine ears. I scorn alike your hatred and reproaches."

"Ah!" cried the poor girl, with bewildered emotion; "am I awake? or has madness seized upon my burning brain? What fearful words were those I heard? Oh, Selborne pardon what my rash tongue gave utterance to, and you recal your cruel words. Oh, you know not how much I need consolation, for my heart is well night broken. Say that you have not deceived the poor confiding girl, who has loved, and still loves you so fondly. Let me again hear you declare that I am your wife, your lawful wedded wife!"

She threw herself on her knees before him with the most intense agony, and looked up in his face with an expression of earnest supplication, but he remained stern and inexorable.

"Away!" he exclaimed; "this letter is a damning proof that you have deceived me, and in so doing have deceived yourself. Thus then do I draw aside the curtain, and reveal the degrading truth. Our marriage was a mockery, a sham; you are not my wife, *Phoebe Mayfield is but the mistress of Lord Selborne!*"

She started to her feet, and for a few minutes became motionless and speechless with horror.

"'Tis done," she at length gasped forth, in a voice, the solemn and almost unearthly tones of which, made even Lord Selborne start; "the frightful gulf yawns beneath my feet. I am a wretch lost degraded; but—" she added, with sudden energy, and fixing upon him a look which made him tremble; "monster! your hapless victim still hath power to curse and loathe you. Let me fly this hated place, the scene of my shame and your vile perfidy. Poor throbbing heart; 'twill break—'twill break! Mother, mother, the poor lost fallen one, comes to make all earthly atonement, and to die, aye, to die upon your grave, in the old church yard."

"Phoebe!" exclaimed Lord Selborne, stung with remorse, and venturing to approach her.

"Away! villain! betrayer! away!" cried our heroine, in frantic accents, and she rushed wildly from the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WANDERER.—THE MEETING.—THE GUILTY PLOT TRIUMPHANT.

"What have I said—what have I done?" cried his lordship, when the unfortunate girl had quitted the room; villain that I am. Phoebe! She's gone, and, in her despair, may rush upon self-destruction. It may not be too late to repent and save her."

Hastily he rang the bell, and Maggy, laughing immoderately at something which seemed to have tickled her fancy, attended the summons.

"Now, girl, where is your mistress?" eagerly demanded Lord Selborne.

"My mistress," repeated Maggy, scornfully; "what Phoebe Mayfield, the poor country rustic? Oh, my lord, I know all about it. Such a start. She has thrown an old cloak over all her finery, and rushed out of the house like mad."

"Gone?" exclaimed his lordship, with much emotion and alarm. "Oh, heartless villain that I am thus to destroy one of nature's finest works. Phoebe!—Phoebe! much wronged girl, oh, let me fly to save you from a fearful and untimely fate!"

Precipitately he rushed out of the house as he spoke, and left the pert Maggy Minx laughing heartily in the hall.

"Here's an adventure," she said, "all the fat's in the fire. Ha ha, ha! So much for the fine stuck up Lady Selborne."

Lord Selborne having first despatched several of his male domestics in different directions, in a state of mind bordering on distraction, himself rushed on he scarcely knew whither, and looking anxiously after every female form that he saw passing in the street, and inquiring of every person he met, in incoherent language, offering large sums of money for any intelligence of the fugitive, but without success; and, in fact, his wild manner, and the strange questions he put, causing him to be looked upon with suspicion by many persons, as some escaped lunatic.

It was a bitter cold night, the snow fell in thick flakes around, and the wind was piercingly keen, adding to the general misery which at that hour prevailed.

The hackney coachman, as he stood on the rank, notwithstanding he was enveloped in a number of great coats and scarves, looked half frozen, and buffeted his sides desperately with his hands, in order to set the blood in circulation, and impart some warmth to his fingers; and the passenger travelled on his way home, bent and shivering.

Then there were miserably, half-clad houseless wretches to be met with at almost

every turn, who crawled along, the very pictures of hunger, poverty and despair.

Alas! what would become of the unfortunate, delicate Phoebe Mayfield on such a night as this, wandering in the piercing cold and in such a state of mind? Lord Selborne shuddered with horror and remorse when he thought of this, and his anguish and self-reproaches knew no bounds; but vain was his search, useless all his inquiries; he could gain no intelligence whatever of the hapless object of his anxiety.

After the lapse of two or three hours, and wandering about in every direction, he returned home in a state of mind which we need not seek to describe.

Henry Ashton and his sister, in the meantime were conducted by Giles and his loquacious but kind-hearted little wife to their "establishment" in the locality of Bermondsey, where they were made as comfortable as possible, and after partaking of a hearty supper, and talking over old affairs, they departed on their return home.

Mr. Sam Filcher was "up to his work," as he elegantly expressed himself, and having made the necessary arrangements for the securing of Henry Ashford by the press-gang, hastened to meet Captain Beaufort at the place of appointment, which was in a street near the one in which Amy and her brother resided.

"This way, my fine fellows," said Sam, to his ruffianly-looking companions, as they entered the street in question, "our customer has given us the slip for the present among the crowd, but we are fairly on the track of him and his sister, and I'll warrant we shall drop upon him presently.

"Filcher," said a cautious voice behind him, and he beheld the captain, who had been anxiously waiting for him for some time.

"Ah, captain," said Sam, "so you're true to yer 'pintment. Vell, I does like *punctuality*, for that's summ't like b's'ness."

"Now, what success?" interrogated Beaufort, impatiently.

"All right," answered Filcher, "ve caught sight of Master Ashford and his sister on 'tother side of the bridge, but ve've lost 'em for a time. Follow us, captain, ve'll nab him afore long, never fear. This way."

The captain assented, and they cautiously departed.

To this street, our unfortunate heroine had by some accident wandered, after she had so abruptly quitted the princely mansion of her seducer. But who shall describe the poignant anguish of her mind, now that she was awakened to all the horrors of her real situation, and she found herself a poor, destitute, friendless outcast?

She paused in the doorway of a house, for she felt faint and exhausted, and her brain was distracted by the tempest of racking thought which crowded so tumultuously upon it. She looked mournfully around her, and shuddered at the dreariness and cheerlessness of the scene; but still she felt not the cold so keenly as might have been expected, and struggled with her feelings boldly and determinedly.

"Each step I take from the scene of my accursed guilt, seems to inspire me with fresh courage," she soliloquised; "yet, oh, what torturing anguish preys upon my heart, and racks my burning brain. I would fain proceed, though I know not whither, and my trembling limbs refuse to perform their office. I must have wandered far, for I am weary, and, in spite of the inclemency of the weather, I must here rest awhile. All Merciful God assist me on this awful and trying occasion, and save me from committing self-destruction in the despair and agony of my feelings."

Wrapping her cloak closer around her, she seated herself on the step of a door before which she was standing, and benumbed by the cold, sunk into a kind of stupor.

The monotonous cry of the watchmen as they slowly and sleepily went their rounds might now be heard, but it disturbed her not, and she remained in the same state of unconsciousness, when one of these ancient guardians of the night, all coat, stick, rattle, and lantern, approached the spot, making an attempt to signify the hour, though all that was distinguishable was, "Ha-a-af past um o'clock," with an occasional yawn in between.

"Well," said the old man, "I think I have nearly gone my round; there or thereabout; there's no chance of a lock-up to-night, so I'll go and lock myself up in my watch-box, and see if I can't get another forty hours—forty winks I mean. Half past—o'clock; ha-a-af past um o'clock!"

Holding up his lantern the better to see his way, the watchman now perceived our heroine as she reclined on the step of the door.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "*here* is a charge, I think. She seems to have been making rather free, or she could not be sleeping here in the cold, which is enough to freeze any one to death. I must wake her up. Now young woman (I call her a young woman at all events); now, then, young 'oman, you can't stop here, constructin' the public thoroughfare, and takin' all the hearthstone off the gentleman's steps. Come, get up."

"Where am I? What is the meaning of all this?" exclaimed the bewildered Phoebe, aroused by the old watchman's words, and the rough manner in which he forced her to her feet.

"What's it mean?" replied the old man, "why, that you're wery drunk and disorderly, and that I must take you to the *watchus*."

"Ah, spare me—spare me," said the terrified Phoebe; you are mistaken; I am a poor wretched woman, who—"

"Gammon," interrupted the ignorant old watchman, "you can't deceive me. Why you're one of the wicousest on my beat—so come along."

"Oh, pity, pity," implored our distracted heroine; "is there no one near to help me?"

"I should only like to *catch* 'em at it," said the ignorant and unfeeling guardian of the night, at the same time rudely grasping the arm of poor Phoebe, and forcing her away; "there, come along, and don't attempt to be obstrepolous, or it will be all the worse for yer."

Our heroine screamed with terror, and struggled violently, but the watchman persisted, and was dragging her along, when she was rescued from his hold by a strong hand, at the same time her deliverer exclaimed—

"Unmanly old ruffian! have you no feeling of pity for a wretched unfortunate woman?"

"Gracious powers!" cried the astonished and distracted Phoebe, turning her gaze eagerly towards the speaker; "that voice! 'Tis he—the much wronged Henry. Oh, pardon—pardon!"

She could say no more, but sunk powerless and sobbing convulsively in his arms.

Yes, it was indeed Henry Ashford and his sister, who, at that critical moment, had arrived at the spot, and the powerful emotions that agitated him, as he held the form of that unfortunate being he still so ardently loved, to his bosom, may be better imagined than described.

"Phoebe, my—my Phoebe," he cried, looking in her pale face with the most melancholy feelings of pity and regret, "poor, ruined wretched girl."

"What?" cried the enraged watchman, "constructed in my duty? Then I'm desperate."

"Oh, pity—pity," supplicated Amy.

"Pooh, pooh—pity, nonsense. I'll lock you up, if you ain't civil, young woman," said the old ruffian.

He sprang his rattle violently, and a crowd quickly gathered on the spot, among whom were Captain Beaufort, Sam Filcher, and the press-gang, the latter of whom roughly seized upon the astonished Henry Ashford.

"So, my fine feller," said Sam, "ve've dropped upon yer at last have ve? I told yer I'd do it, eh, captain?"

"Ruffians; what means this outrage?" indignantly demanded Henry.

"Vhy, it means this here," replied Filcher,

"this is the press-gang; you are von of his majesty's *nautical sailors*, and must go on board the Tender, lying off the Tower."

"Oh, mercy—mercy! spare my poor brother," cried Amy, in an agony of terror.

"All right, my fair Amy," replied Captain Beaufort, throwing his arms around her waist, while the frantic Phoebe clung to Henry, and shrieked aloud for help, "I'll take charge of you."

Poor Henry struggled desperately, but was overpowered and forced away. The captain and Filcher got roughly treated by the mob, and Amy was rescued, and was about to follow her brother, when she looked round for Phoebe, with the wish that she should accompany her, and was astonished to find that she had disappeared, how, none of the bystanders seemed able to inform her.

With a sad heart poor Amy followed her unfortunate brother, of whose protection she now seemed too certainly deprived.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ANGUISH OF SUSPENSE.—REMORSE.

Enraged at the partial defeat of his plans, and the escape of Amy, the libertine, Captain Beaufort, after recovering from the effects of a violent blow he had received from one of the crowd, and finding himself alone—the amiable Sam Filcher having accompanied the press-gang with their victim—walked slowly away towards a tavern he used occasionally, venting curses on everything and everybody, and vowing vengeance, and that nothing whatever should yet prevent him from accomplishing his designs against Amy Ashford, especially as her brother was now removed out of the way.

The appearance of our heroine on the scene of action, and under such singular circumstances, surprised and bewildered him, and he was anxious to see Lord Selborne for an explanation of the circumstance, though he had a strong suspicion as to the facts.

In the meantime, Lord Selborne was a prey to all the torturing anguish of remorse, and terrible were the fears that distracted his imagination as to what had become of Phoebe, and what was the nature of the desperate course which she contemplated, and to which the villany of his own conduct had driven her.

He recalled to his mind in the most glowing characters, all her numerous virtues, her amiable and gentle disposition, and the many fond endearments she had bestowed upon him, and when he reflected upon the heartless and treacherous part he had played to—

wards her, he could not but look upon himself as a monster of the basest ingratitude.

He did not venture to retire to bed, and never before had he passed a night of such terrible mental anguish. He now, for the first time, really discovered the extent and strength of the passion he entertained for the beautiful, innocent girl, and what could ever compensate him for the loss of her dear society, especially when he was convinced that she must now look upon him with thorough disgust and hatred?

He traversed his chamber with disordered steps, and gave vent to his feelings in useless lamentations and regret.

"Villain, deceiver that I am," he soliloquised, "how must my conduct be viewed by the world? and can I look upon myself with any other feelings than those of scorn, shame and disgust? I feel degraded by my own guilty deeds, and shall be ashamed henceforth to show my face in honourable and respectable society. What happiness might I have experienced, had I have acted with truth and justice towards that fair being who placed such affectionate confidence in the sincerity of my vows? But now—oh, terrible are the thoughts that rush upon my distracted brain, and I dare not contemplate the dreadful future."

He beat his breast in despair and anguish, and in vain endeavoured to find consolation, for conscience, guilty conscience, would not allow him any.

"Alas," he again soliloquised, "to what rash and fatal act may not the agony, the frenzy of the poor girl's feelings urge her? Even ere this, she may have laid violent hands on herself, and, in that case, shall I not be indirectly her murderer? Good God, that thought is enough to drive me to madness, and to arouse every feeling of compunction within my breast. What can I do?—how avert the terrible evils I apprehend? would—oh, would I could recal the fearful past, and make ample atonement in the future."

He again gave himself up to a paroxysm of the wildest despair, and in that torturing state of mind he continued throughout the night, and the morning brought with it no relief, for the servants, who had been sent in every direction in search of the fair fugitive, had returned without being able to obtain the least tidings of her.

What course to pursue, what plans to adopt that were likely to lead to her discovery, the wretched nobleman knew not; his brain was completely bewildered.

Her departure had been so abrupt that he could scarcely believe in its reality, and a thousand times he cursed himself for his cruel, unjust, and impetuous conduct, which

had led to such fatal and such fearful consequences.

The first arrival on the following morning at the mansion in St. James's Square, was that of the Widow Wildlove, she having not long returned from the *fete* at Montpelier House.

The distracted state in which she found his lordship, and the astounding intelligence he gave her of the flight of Phoebe, excited her unbounded astonishment, and she could scarcely believe the evidence of her ears.

"The foolish, headstrong girl," she observed, "to abandon those luxuries and pleasures she might still have indulged, had she divested herself of her freezing coldness and ridiculous prudery; especially friendless in the world as she now is, and without any one to whom she can apply for assistance and protection. She will doubtless repent of her folly before long, and regret the rash step she has been so thoughtlessly induced to take. One would have thought that to be the mistress of such a distinguished nobleman as Lord Selborne, might have been considered a sufficient honour by the little rustic. But there are really no bounds to the presumption of some people."

"Hold, Mrs. Wildlove," returned his lordship, with a look of disgust and indignation, "your heartless observations surprise and annoy me. Oh, how different was the return that the virtuous love of the unfortunate Phoebe Mayfield deserved from me."

"Why surely, my lord," said the abandoned widow with a coarse and unfeeling laugh, "you are not going to suffer this little affair to trouble you so seriously. Really it is time that the ardour of your passion for this country beauty cooled a little, and that you should honour some other damsel with your favours and attentions."

"Cease this levity of talk, madam," said Lord Selborne, with a look and in a tone of resentment, "to my ears it is both painful and revolting, and reflects anything but credit on your womanly feeling or sense of virtue and decorum."

"Indeed," returned the widow, haughtily, and in a tone of sarcasm, "I cannot but admire my Lord Selborne in his new character of moralist and censor; although I am by no means disposed to listen to a lecture from him, and being now as I have ever been the mistress of my own actions, and totally indifferent to the opinions of others. My conversation being apparently disagreeable to you on this occasion, I will wish you good morning; and beg to express my sympathy with you in the loss of the fair rustic who seems so completely to have infatuated your senses."

Thus saying the widow, with a formal

curtsey, and a satirical smile quitted the room, and his lordship made no effort to detain her, for he felt vexed and disgusted with her unfeeling language.

She had not been gone many minutes, and Lord Selborne was endeavouring in some measure to regain his composure, when Captain Beaufort was announced, and quickly entered the room, the expression of his features showing that he had something of importance to communicate. He viewed the excitement and agitation of his lordship with apparent indifference.

"You have no occasion to do more, my dear Selborne," he remarked, "than to explain some of the circumstances that led to the event which seems to cause you so much uneasiness. The one great fact I am already acquainted with—Phoebe has left you."

"Ah," cried Lord Selborne, with a look of astonishment, "how know you that, Beaufort."

"Because I saw her myself last night wandering the streets," answered the captain, "her elegant and fashionable dress concealed under an old cloak, and her whole appearance wretched and dejected."

"Is it possible that you speak the truth, Captain Beaufort?" interrogated Lord Selborne, eagerly, and fixing a keen and penetrating look upon him.

"Why should you doubt me, my lord?" demanded Beaufort with some little show of being offended. "I repeat that I not only saw but spoke to Phoebe."

"Oh, where?"

"In a street near Bermondsey, and in the company of Henry Ashford and his sister."

"Impossible," said his lordship, with a look of astonishment and incredulity, "I cannot believe it."

"It is true. But if you still entertain any jealous feelings towards your rival after Phoebe Mayfield has deserted you, you may safely set your doubts and fears at rest, for he, at any rate, is removed, out out of harm's way."

"You surprise me; what mean you? I pray you explain yourself."

Beaufort did so in as few words as possible, and Lord Selborne listened to him with mingled feelings of astonishment, disgust, and anguish.

"Oh, Beaufort," he observed, "this is surely both cruel and cowardly work; and you will not persist in your guilty designs against the amiable Amy Ashford?"

"Think you that I am to be moved from my purpose by her obstinate resistance?" answered the libertine, "especially after all the trouble I have taken, and having got her brother out of the way. No, I am not going to abandon my designs so readily, I assure

you. But you have not related to me the extraordinary particulars that have led to the separation between yourself and Phoebe Mayfield."

Lord Selborne would fain have excused himself, for he felt too violently agitated after what he had heard from Captain Beaufort, but the latter would not listen to any denial, and he therefore complied with much emotion.

"A most fortunate affair, my lord," said Captain Beaufort, when he had concluded; "really a most fortunate affair, and I congratulate you on your having so easily got rid of a burthen which must have been becoming irksome to you."

"Captain Beaufort," said his lordship, seriously, "is it possible that you can treat this painful event, and which tortures and distracts my mind, so lightly? Bitterly does my conscience reproach me for the base, the treacherous part I have acted towards the unfortunate Phoebe, and, oh, how gladly, how willingly would I make all the atonement in my power, for I feel that I have been most guilty."

"Tut, tut, my lord, you reproach yourself too keenly on this subject," returned the captain, "and I am surprised to hear you talk so foolishly. It is quite evident that the passion which Phoebe once probably entertained towards you, had greatly subsided, or she could not have made up her mind to abandon you so easily and abruptly."

"Ah, no," said his lordship, "I am convinced you wrong her greatly, Beaufort, by that supposition. Oh, what undeniable proofs have I had of the sincerity, and the fervour of Phoebe's virtuous love. Would to Heaven it had been bestowed on a far more worthy object, and would have rewarded her heart's pure and warm affections, and her generous self-devotion as they deserved. It was only when I had disclosed the fearful and disgusting secret that she was my mistress and not my wife, that, horrorstruck, and resolved no longer to continue in shame and infamy, she boldly, resolutely, virtuously threw off the shackles that hitherto bound her, and breathing her just curses and reproaches upon my guilty head, left me with scorn and loathing. Oh, Beaufort, much as you may affect to deride my remorse, most keenly, bitterly do I feel my own debasement—the heartless villany of which I have been guilty. But Phoebe, friendless, destitute as she now is, whither can she go? Oh, would that I could once more see her, that I might throw myself at her feet, crave her forgiveness, and endeavour to make her all the reparation in my power for the great injuries I have done her."

"Nonsense, my lord," returned the liber-



time, "this is sheer weakness and folly, totally unworthy of you, and you must endeavour to arouse yourself from it. You will, no doubt, in the society of other females of equal beauty, and far greater accomplishments, soon learn to forget your late innamorata, and fear not that she will also fail to bestow her favours and affections upon some new lover, and learn to treat the past with the most cold indifference."

"Hold, Beaufort, I enjoin you," said his lordship, indignantly, "I cannot patiently listen to these monstrous libels upon the virtue and integrity of the unfortunate Phoebe Mayfield. She is no abandoned wanton, but in heart and principle still as pure and good as before I contaminated her. I have destroyed the fondly cherished hopes I had excited in her bosom, and blighted all

her prospects for ever; and surely the curses of offended heaven will pursue me for it."

"Do you then regret that you did not elevate this simple country girl to rank and station by making her your lawful wife?" interrogated Beaufort, with a sneer.

"Oh, would to heaven that I had done so," replied the repentant nobleman, fervently, "what a heavy burden of care, and anxiety, and self-reproach would be removed from my conscience."

"Humph," returned Beaufort, half aside, and with a quick and sinister look which did not escape the quick and anxious eye of Lord Selborne, "but methinks you would be induced to change your mind if such a circumstance could be proved to be the fact."

"What mean you, Captain Beaufort?"

demanding Selborne, eagerly, "your words are ambiguous."

"No matter," answered the former, impatiently, "I see you are in no mood to discuss this delicate subject dispassionately on the present occasion, so we will say no more upon it till some more fitting opportunity. You are now free and untrammelled, my lord, and I would advise you to take advantage of it, and to endeavour to find some fair one, whose smiles will more than compensate you for the loss of Phoebe Mayfield."

"Never, never," said his lordship, vehemently; "how little do you know me, Captain Beaufort, if you imagine the passion with which Phoebe inspired me, from the first moment I beheld her, is of so fleeting and evanescent a nature. Her personal charms, and intrinsic virtues have made an impression upon my heart that nothing can ever destroy; and after what has occurred, never shall I again know happiness till I have once more seen her, and sought her forgiveness for the wrongs I have done her."

"Well, I pity you, my lord for your weakness, and the infatuation under which you labour," observed the captain, in his usual reckless manner, "but I hope you will be able to rid yourself of such feelings in time, and to become yourself again. For my own part, I am resolved not to be thwarted in the designs I have formed against the cold and insensible, but beautiful Amy Ashford, and now that I have—with the assistance of Mr. Sam Filcher, who by-the-bye is a most useful scoundrel—managed to get her brother safe on shipboard, and he is not likely to set his foot on shore again in a hurry, I have no cause to doubt that I shall shortly be able to obtain the full accomplishment of my wishes."

"Beware, Beaufort, what you do," said his lordship, seriously, "I am fully aware of the amiable and exalted qualities which Amy Ashford possesses, and the friendship which ever existed between her and Phoebe, and I feel an interest in her fate, and should deeply regret if any harm were to befall her; ponder, reflect, ere you consign an innocent woman to shame, and misery, and ruin."

"Psha," replied the hardened libertine, with a scornful laugh; "why, I declare your lordship is getting quite sentimental. But you will pardon me, if I decline your sage advice in this respect, I believe I am perfectly capable of managing my own little amours myself. However, as I have some important business to attend to, I must now leave you. Good day, my lord, and I hope when I see you again to find you in better spirits than you are at present."

With these words, Captain Beaufort bowed and quitted his lordship's presence, not much to the regret of the latter, who felt thoroughly

disgusted with the brutal observations he had made use of, and which exactly corresponded with those of the Widow Wildlove.

"The captain is a villain," said Lord Selborne to himself, when the former had quitted the room, "and I have disgraced myself by associating with him so long. He seeks the destruction of the unfortunate Amy Ashford, but shall I not endeavour to frustrate his guilty designs, and now her brother is torn from her, seek to throw the shield of my protection around her? Yes, I will do so, and may it be received as some atonement for the cruel wrongs that I have done to the hapless Phoebe."

The idea pleased him, and for a time, in some measure, tended to abate the agony of his grief. Captain Beaufort, in the course of conversation, had, but probably unintentionally, disclosed the address of the poor seamstress, with which his lordship had before been unacquainted, and he now determined to hasten there without delay, and see what advice he could render the unfortunate woman in her present critical and deplorable situation.

At the least he could afford her pecuniary aid, of which he was satisfied she stood so much in need, and he could persuade her to remove to more respectable lodgings than those she at present occupied, in a remote part of the town, unknown to Beaufort, and thus his nefarious designs for the present, at any rate, would be frustrated, and an essential service he rendered his intended victim at the very time she the most required it.

Lord Selborne fully anticipated the reception he might expect to have from Amy Ashford, knowing as she did the guilty part he had acted towards her friend Phoebe, but he determined to bear her reproaches with patience and forbearance, knowing how richly he deserved them, and trusted, at least, he was convinced that Amy would be the first to forgive him, when she knew that his penitence was sincere.

Besides—although it appeared from the statements of Captain Beaufort to be a mystery to him—Amy might give him some clue to Phoebe, and enable him to seek that reconciliation, and to make that just and honourable atonement for which he was now so anxious.

Elated with these thoughts, and sanguine with hope and expectation, his lordship ordered his horse to be got ready immediately, and mounting it, accompanied by his faithful groom, rode off at full speed to the miserable neighbourhood in which Amy Ashford resided.

They soon arrived in Bermondsey, but had some difficulty in finding out the obscure

and dirty street in which Amy dwelt, but when they did, his lordship hesitated for some time before the house, and gazed with feelings of pity and disgust at the wretched and squalid poverty it denoted.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AMY ASHFORD AND LORD SELBORNE.

In a miserable, dark and dismal back room, scantily furnished, and with scarcely any fire in the grate on that cold winter's day, Amy Ashford was sitting disconsolately, her elbow on the old deal table, and her head resting on her hand.

She had been weeping violently, tears were still on her cheeks, and deep sobs convulsed her bosom.

Her heart was indeed full to bursting, for nothing could possibly be more wretched, lonely, and deplorable than her present situation. Her poor brother was cruelly torn from her, she feared it might be for ever, and she was now left without a protector, or any one to whom she could communicate her sorrow, or look for consolation.

Henry had been taken forthwith on board the *Tender*, and Amy had not been permitted even to have a parting interview with him, all her tears and supplications being met by insult and derision.

With a heavy heart she returned to her miserable lodging, from the shelter of which even she expected shortly to be driven, as she was in arrears for rent, and her landlady, who was an ignorant, brutal-minded woman, rated her in the most measured terms because she was unable to pay it.

Then the bold and infamous conduct of the libertine, Captain Beaufort, pained and disgusted her; it was evident that it was by his means her brother had been forced away, and now that she was deprived of his protection, to what fresh dangers might she not be exposed? Captain Beaufort knew her residence, and she felt that she had everything to fear from him, for he was not the sort of man who would easily be induced to abandon any nefarious designs upon which he had fixed his mind.

The unexpected meeting with Phoebe, too, under such extraordinary circumstances, greatly surprised and bewildered her; and her no less sudden disappearance immediately after the seizure of Henry, added much to her anxiety and perplexity.

What to do, or what course to adopt for the best she knew not, for to add to her misfortunes, she was now almost without employment, the little she had being insuffi-

cient to procure her the most scanty of the necessaries of life. Her brain was distracted.

Should she, she reflected, in her present wretched and destitute situation seek for parish relief? No, her heart revolted at the thought, her independent spirit shrunk from the idea of pauperism, and she well knew the insults the unfortunate poor often met with from ignorant and brutal-minded parish officials.

"Alas, alas," she sighed, as these gloomy thoughts arose in her mind, "what—oh, what will now become of me, friendless, miserable, destitute being that I am, and deprived of the protection of my poor brother? Where can I look, whither can I go for hope, assistance, or consolation? Terrible is the prospect before me, and I shudder at the contemplation. Kind providence look down with mercy upon me, I humbly beseech thee, and guide and assist me in this fearful emergency."

A loud knock at the street-door, at that moment, startled and surprised her, especially as at the time there was no one in the house but herself; and she hesitated whether or not to open the door, fearing that it might be the villain Captain Beaufort, who had dared to visit her in her abode of poverty and misery; but she was not left to decide; for the street door, it appeared, had been left open though the visitor had knocked, and she now heard footsteps in the passage approaching her room, and immediately afterwards a gentle tap at the door.

Her heart palpitated violently with fear and expectation, and she could not move from her seat. The knock was repeated, and finding that no one answered, the door was gently opened, and Amy could not help uttering a faint cry of alarm when the form of a man met her sight, but how much was her astonishment increased when she immediately recognised Lord Selborne.

Struck with the wretched appearance of the room, and the pale and grief-worn features of its unfortunate occupant, Lord Selborne stood immovable for a minute or two, and, gazing with feelings of pity and commiseration, was unable to utter a word; but the terrible, the heart-sickening thought at the time occurred to him, that too probably Phoebe Mayfield was or would be exposed to even still greater misery than that he saw before him, and all caused by the villany of his conduct.

"Amy Ashford," he at length said, advancing into the room, "you are no doubt surprised to see me."

"Surprised, my lord," replied Amy, in a faltering voice, "can you wonder if I should be so? To what may I attribute the visit of the betrayer of the unfortunate Phoebe

Mayfield, and who is now abandoned to want, shame, and misery, to this wretched dwelling?"

"Spare your reproaches, Amy, I beseech you," said his lordship, "though I do acknowledge that I deserve them, and am racked with anguish and remorse. Alas, Phoebe has left me, driven forth, I own, by my unjust and cruel accusations, and I am lost in misery and despair. You have seen her, have you not? Oh, tell me, I implore you, know you where she now is?"

Amy, with a sigh of regret, replied in the negative, and then briefly informed his lordship of what had occurred on the fatal night that her brother was seized by the press-gang. He struck his forehead in despair, and for a minute or two remained silent.

"How torturing is this uncertainty and suspense," he said, at length; "I shall go distracted."

"Ah, my lord," said Amy, "too much have you cause to reproach yourself. Poor Phoebe, little did she deserve so cruel a fate; and your friend, your abandoned associate, he has dared to insult and wound my feelings, and the better to accomplish his base and guilty designs, has torn my poor brother from my protection. Come you, my lord, to advocate the cause of the heartless libertine, Captain Beaufort, or to exult in the utter misery by which you see the friend and companion of your hapless victim surrounded?"

"Amy Ashford," replied Lord Selborne, with a slight expression of reproach and mortified pride, "you greatly wrong me by these ungenerous suppositions. There is no one who can more strongly deprecate the conduct of Captain Beaufort towards you and your brother than myself. 'Tis to assure you of that—of my determination to protect you from his evil designs—to express to you my sympathy in your unmerited misfortunes, and to offer you all the friendly assistance in my power, that I now come."

"Oh, my lord," said Amy, tears starting to her eyes, and at the same time fixing upon him a look of doubt and suspicion, "can you be sincere in what you have just now said, or do you only mock my misery and anguish?"

"Oh, what a heartless scoundrel you must take me to be, Amy Ashford," replied his lordship, "to think me capable of such conduct. I am ready to swear that I am prompted only by the most generous, humane, and honourable motives."

"And why should your lordship take so great an interest in the fate of so humble an individual as myself?" demanded the poor seamstress, eagerly.

"Because you were ever the friend of poor Phoebe," he replied, with a sigh, "and I

know she loved you as a sister. But not for that alone, but to show my admiration of your virtues, Amy, and with the melancholy hope that my conduct towards you may be received as some atonement for the injuries I have done her. Tell me then, I beg, in what way can I best serve you, and I will willingly, eagerly do so."

"Oh, my lord," ejaculated Amy, now convinced of the sincerity of his intentions by the candour and earnestness of his manner, "this unexpected kindness and consideration from you quite overwhelms me, and I know not what to say."

"Compose yourself, I pray," said the nobleman, taking a chair which she had handed to him, "and listen calmly to what I have to say to you, for it is necessary that arrangements should immediately be made for your relief, and preservation from any designs that Captain Beaufort may contemplate against you."

Amy, who could scarcely believe the evidence of her ears, looked her thanks, but could not make any reply, and his lordship proceeded—

"It is, I am convinced, totally useless to attempt to restore your brother to you at present, much as seamen are required, but I trust that providence will preserve him through the perils and dangers to which he may be exposed, and I will see that a portion of his pay while he is absent shall be appropriated towards your support."

"Oh, my lord," replied Amy, "this indeed is most kind of you, and I cannot sufficiently express my thanks."

"Nay, my poor girl," said his lordship, "I need them not, for I consider what I propose to do no more than my duty. In the first place, you must remove from this wretched place to one of decency and comfort, and thereby you will be enabled to avoid Captain Beaufort, and to frustrate his designs. Say, does this arrangement meet with your approbation?"

"How can it do otherwise, my lord," replied Amy.

"Then the sooner it is carried into effect the better. Whatever money you may require is at your service."

Amy again returned her thanks, for his lordship had, by his generous offers, removed a weight of care and anxiety from her mind.

"Pardon me, my lord," she observed, "if I cannot find language sufficiently powerful to express my feelings. What, oh, what return can I ever make for your disinterested kindness to me in this, the time of my greatest need?"

"I seek no other return, Amy Ashford," answered Lord Selborne, "than the assurance of your friendship; and also that you

will aid me in my endeavours to find Phoebe so that I may be able to render her all the atonement in my power."

"Most willingly will I do that," returned Amy, "and may heaven aid you in your praiseworthy intentions. Poor Phoebe, I am as anxious for her fate as for my own, and trust that providence will protect her from all those dangers by which she will be too probably surrounded."

Lord Selborne sighed, and expressed his fears for the worst, and after some further conversation, and it being arranged that Amy should remove from her present lodging with as little delay as possible, and to write to his lordship acquainting him in confidence with her address, he laid a purse upon the table containing more money than sufficient for her present use, he took his leave, and remounting his horse, he rode towards home, lighter of heart, and more sanguine with hope than he had been for some hours before.

When Lord Selborne was gone, Amy, who was completely overwhelmed with astonishment and emotion at this unexpected occurrence, threw herself on her knees, and fervently returned her thanks to the supreme for this merciful interposition in the midst of her many misfortunes, and besought His protection for her poor brother.

Anxious to remove from her present residence as quickly as possible, she almost immediately after Lord Selborne's departure, left the house, and made her way towards a more respectable part of the town in search of a decent lodging.

The following day, Captain Beaufort, not entertaining the least doubt as to the complete success of his guilty designs, in which he calculated upon the assistance of the landlady, boldly knocked at the door of Amy's late dwelling, and his rage, astonishment, and disappointment may be imagined when he heard of her abrupt departure, and that the woman of the house either would not, or could not, give him any information as to whither she had gone.

The villain gave vent to his passion in curses loud and deep, and left the house vowing that he would spare neither trouble nor expense to endeavour to discover her, and to secure the accomplishment of his diabolical wishes.

Amy lost no time in forwarding her address and thanks to Lord Selborne, and he visited her in a day or two, to render her more assistance, and to consult with her what was best to be done to endeavour to discover the unfortunate Phoebe.

But when day after day elapsed, and he could still obtain not the least tidings of her, although he had employed every means to do

so, and had inserted advertisements in all the newspapers, offering a large reward for any information respecting her, the agony of his feelings, and his thorough despair may be imagined, but cannot be described.

Thus days, weeks wore away, and the torturing mystery remained unravelled, and not the least intelligence could be obtained which might lead to the discovery of the fate which had befallen Phoebe Mayfield.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OLD SCENES AND ASSOCIATIONS.—THE WANDERER'S RETURN.

Many months have now elapsed since the foregoing events took place, and still greater were the changes. Lord Selborne attended by one servant only, had left town, and was supposed to be travelling in different parts of the country in the fruitless search for Phoebe. Amy Ashford had returned to her native village, and her brother having returned in safety from his first voyage, the war having been brought to a sudden and unexpected termination, they now resided together in a neat little cottage a short distance from the village, with every comfort that they could wish for.

Poor Mark Mayfield, to whom the villagers behaved with much kindness, was still the recluse of the old stone house, and was reduced to a pitiable state of imbecility, at times wandering about, and muttering to himself in the most melancholy and plaintive accents:

"All alone, now—all alone in the world."

But terrible was the change in the circumstances of Captain Beaufort, fortune deserted him at the gaming-table, he sold his commission, squandered the money recklessly, and the once man of fashion was completely beggared.

He left town abruptly, accompanied by the worthy Mr. Sam Filcher, and they were now said to be leading a low vagabond life together about the country.

It was a beautiful bright May day, such a one as was described in an early chapter of our tale, the day of the celebration of the harvest-home, and the bells were ringing merrily in the old church steeple, and the villagers were bustling to and fro, dressed in their best, as if for some joyous and festive occasion.

Farmer Hodge and several of the villagers were making their way to the May-pole, and as they did so they amused themselves by singing the following simple chorus—

Mirth inviting, all delighting,
 Banish care far, far away;
 Pleasure sharing, happy cheering,
 To welcome in this blithesome May.

"Aye, neighbour," said Hodge, "blithesome May be comin in wi' smiles an' sunshine, so we should welcome it wi' cheerful hearts and happy faces. We're all invited to have a merry dance round the maypole, which be erected on the green lawn in front o' Squire Stubble's hospitable mansion. He an' his amiable lady be expected to-day from Scarborough, you know, and they would like to see us all merry on the occasion."

"Ah," said one of the villagers, "Squire Stubbles, as he is now called, be a rare friend to the poor since he had that large fortin left him, and I be glad o' he an' his lady's prosperity."

"An' so we all be, I reckon," said Hodge, "for they be constantly doing some good or other. Why, did they not behave like a brother and sister to poor Amy Ashford, while Harry was away at sea, and didn't Squire Stubbles by his influence in the parish get honest Bob Bristles, on his return home from Lunnon, made beadle?"

"To be sure he did," answered another of the rustics, "and don't Bob look mortal fine in his gold-laced coat, and cocked hat, and beef-steak collar an' cuffs?"

"Ees," said Hodge, "an' moreover, didn't Squire Stubbles offer to take poor Mark Mayfield into his house, and treat him the same as one of the family for the rest o' his days? But the foolish o'd mon refused, and there he do sit moping all day in the o'd stone house, where he ha' taken up his dwelling, brooding o'er his sorrows, an' talking to himself 'bout his runaway daughter Phoebe."

From this brief colloquy it will be seen that one of the most extraordinary changes was that which had taken place in the circumstances of honest Giles Stubbles and his good-hearted wife.

Only about two months prior to the period of which we are writing, a very distant relation, whom he had never seen, and had scarcely ever heard, died, and left him the whole of his property, and which amounted to a very handsome fortune.

This wonderful change in circumstances, however, made no alteration in the dispositions and principles of Giles and his wife; they bade adieu to fried-fish and pastry, and the not over fashionable purlieus of Fryingpan Alley, Bermondsey, and resolved to return to their native place, and enjoy themselves, and make everybody else comfortable for the rest of their days. How far they had already carried out that praiseworthy resolution has been shown by the observations of

the villagers; and there were no persons who were looked upon with more respect in the neighbourhood than "Squire Stubbles and his lady."

But to return to the part from which we have thus shortly digressed.

Hodge was interrupted in the midst of his praises of Stubbles, by a low moaning cry, as if from some person in pain, at a short distance, and, looking in the direction from whence it proceeded, they perceived it was a woman, miserably clad, and apparently exhausted with want and fatigue, and scarcely able to move one limb after the other.

"Poor thing," said Hodge, kindly, "she do look very wretched, sure enough; but then," he added, "there be so many impostors about, that one don't know who to relieve. Let's stand aside, neighbours, and observe her."

They did so, and slowly and feebly the woman approached the spot, and staggering to a tree, which grew close by, she was compelled to lean against it for support.

It was the long lost and unfortunate Phoebe Mayfield.

But, oh, how fearful was the change which time and sorrow, want and privation had wrought in the appearance of that once fair being; it was indeed difficult to recognise her, so terrible were the ravages that long suffering had made upon her.

Her form was thin and emaciated, nearly all the once matchless charms of her person had disappeared; her cheeks were ghastly pale as those of a corpse, her eyes were dim, and sunken in their sockets, and her handsome features were pinched and careworn, and bore but little resemblance to what they formerly were.

Mournfully she looked around her, and then, in a faint voice, she muttered to herself—

"Weak, faint, and exhausted, my trembling limbs refuse to support even the feeble weight of my body, and I can never proceed further. Oh, when will this life of misery and horror have an end? Scenes of my happy childhood, and dare I again gaze upon ye, or to pollute your sacred precincts with my presence? Oh, let me begone. This is no place for the wretched, guilty outcast."

She again tried to move from the spot, when, at that moment the village bells rung forth one of their liveliest peals, and it fell upon the ears of the miserable Phoebe with maddening effect.

"Are those merry sounds which I, in the happy days of innocence, so oft have listened to with feelings of real delight, they seem now to mock my anguish and remorse. I must not, dare not linger here to listen to them. Let me away, let me away to scenes

more congenial with the gloom and horror, the misery and despair of my distracted mind."

With difficulty she moved away from the spot as she spoke, and Hodge and his companions, who had been watching her narrowly but still had not overheard what she had said, came forward with looks of sympathy.

"For the love of heaven, and in mercy, I beseech you pity and relieve a poor starving woman, who has travelled many weary miles, and is completely exhausted," she said, in melancholy plaintive accents, and sinking on her knees at the feet of Hodge.

"Poor thing," said the latter, "she be very sadly, and needs immediate assistance. Come, come, cheer thee, my good woman, and—"

At that moment he caught a full and distinct view of her features, and immediately recognising her, he exclaimed—

"Why, it be the guilty Phoebe Mayfield!"

"Yes, yes," said the distracted Phoebe, looking up imploringly in the farmer's face, and tears of the most poignant anguish chasing each other rapidly down her pale cheeks, "guilty, but penitent. Oh, spurn me not, I implore you, for heaven knows how terribly I have suffered for my errors. Oh, pity, pity."

"Phoebe Mayfield," replied Hodge, in a stern and reproachful voice, "you are justly punished; thy mother's shade should rise from the grave and curse thee. But get thee gone, wretched girl, and hide thy shame from mortal sight. Come, my lads."

Thus saying, Hodge and his companions turned un pitying away, and retiring from the spot, left the unfortunate Phoebe to her utter misery and despair.

"Oh, God!" she cried, in tones of indescribable agony, "try not this breaking heart too severely. What said he? hide my shame from mortal eye? Yes, yes, I will do so; let me begone, while I have yet sufficient strength to do so. At the end of the village is the old churchyard, and by the ivied porch is the yew tree, beneath whose sombre shade my poor mother always expressed a wish that her cold remains might rest. There then let me kneel in penitence and remorse, and die—die."

With a burst of agony, which seemed to come from the deepest recesses of her heart, she arose from her knees, and staggered from the spot.

She had not been gone a minute, when Sam Filcher and Beaufort, both miserably ragged and dirty, and being the very personification of vagabondism, made their appearance.

"Come along guvner," said Sam Filcher, "yer ain't quite such a swell as yer use to

vos; but never mind, don't be down-hearted, here's sam Filcher vith the price of a pot o' heavy left yet, so let us go and be happy together."

"I wish I could get rid of this scoundrel," said Beaufort, aside, and he then added aloud; "no, Sam, I am anxious to make my way to the next town, where I have reason to believe that Lord Selborne is at present stopping."

"And do yer think as how his lordship vill condescend to see yer, or to speak to yer in them here toggs?" demanded Filcher.

"He dare not refuse me," replied Beaufort; "I have a secret to whisper in his ear which will make him completely the slave of my will."

"Oh, then, in course," remarked Sam, "that alters the case altogether."

"I cannot help thinking, Filcher," continued Beaufort, "that Phoebe Mayfield is still living, and is somewhere in this part of the country, and that Lord Selborne, stung with remorse, is endeavouring to find her out, to seek to bring about a reconciliation with her and her father; but I fancy he will change his mind after I have had converse with him."

"I smells a plant," observed Sam, "of course I'm to go snacks in this b'sness, guvner?"

"We will talk of that by-and-bye," returned his companion; "come let us be going."

They were now walking away, when Beaufort suddenly stopped, and nudging Filcher, directed his attention to some object that was coming along the lane.

"What's the matter now?" interrogated Sam.

"Do you not see?"

"In course I does. It's only a female 'oman."

"Yes, and one of the loveliest in creation. Do you not recognise her?"

"Not disactly. Aye—what—vell I never, if it ain't your old flame, Amy Ashford, captain."

"True. She's coming this way, we'll step aside and observe her."

They retired behind a cluster of trees, and immediately afterwards Amy Ashford appeared on the spot.

"I wish my dear brother would return," she said, "for I feel so sad and lonely in his absence. Our friends are all assembled round the maypole, and he promised to accompany me to join them in their sports. I will hasten on, and perhaps I may meet him."

She was about to proceed, when Beaufort and Sam Filcher came forth from their place of concealment, and she shrunk back

alarmed at their uncouth and suspicious appearance.

"Well met, Amy Ashford," said Beaufort, "I have long been most anxious to see you."

"What means this boldness?" demanded Amy, in a tremulous voice; "who are you, sir?"

"Do you not recollect me?" interrogated Beaufort, insolently; "to be sure I am somewhat altered in personal appearance, but I am a perfect gentleman for all that, I assure you."

"Oh, yes," rejoined Filcher, "we are both on us perfect gentlemen, and no mistake."

"Ah, that voice—those features!" exclaimed the terrified Amy, "oh, yes, I know you both now. Let me pass, do not attempt to obstruct me."

"Wot," cried Sam, "give the cold shoulder to old partiklers; I feels myself insulted."

"Come, Amy," remarked Beaufort, seizing her by the arm, "you have long succeeded in eluding me, but now that we have again met, we must not part so easily. I heard you say that there was no one at home in your cottage; it is a famous opportunity, so we will hasten there, and talk over old affairs."

"Unhand me, ruffian," exclaimed Amy, "how dare you thus insult me?"

"Nay, resistance is useless," replied Beaufort; "I am determined. Lend a hand, Filcher."

"All right, captain," said the fellow, also seizing Amy.

She shrieked aloud, and struggled to release herself, but in vain, and her strength was almost exhausted, when at that critical moment Harry Ashford, Bob Bristles, now the beadle, and several villagers arrived at the spot, the two ruffians were felled to the earth, and Amy rushed to the arms of her brother for protection.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SUFFERINGS OF PHOEBE.

We must now go back to events that occurred some months previously to those we have just related, and follow the adventures of the unfortunate Phoebe, after that fatal night when she fled from the house of her seducer.

Terrible indeed had been the bodily and mental sufferings of the poor girl, and it was truly wonderful how she continued to survive them, and how she had hitherto been preserved from actual starvation.

At the moment that Henry Ashford was dragged away by the press-gang, delirium

seemed to seize upon her senses, and when she revived to something like consciousness she found herself hastening with frantic speed along a back street, and that she had lost sight of Henry and his sister, and all the other persons, and she was so bewildered that she scarcely knew what she was about or remembered what had taken place.

Still she hurried on, with unabated speed, and such was the effect which recent events had had upon her, that she looked upon every person with whom she met as she proceeded with dread and suspicion, and sought to avoid them.

It was now snowing fast, and the night was extremely bleak and cold, but Phoebe took little heed of the weather, so busily and painfully were her thoughts occupied another way. But at length she was compelled to pause to take breath, and then the whole of the circumstances that had taken place, and her truly hopeless and awful situation rushed with overwhelming force upon her recollection, and she beat her breast, and groaned aloud in the agony of her despair.

She looked around her with frenzied eyes, and the dreariness and misery of all that met her gaze completely appalled her, and bewildered her senses.

She now repented having left the unfortunate Henry Ashford and his sister so abruptly, but yet it was useless for her to attempt to retrace her steps, as it was not at all likely that she would again be able to meet with them. Yet where could she go? Whither direct her course, stranger as she was to the great metropolis, and alone and unprotected. Her limbs already almost refused their office, and she could not remain exposed to the inclemency of the weather in the cheerless streets during the night.

At the sound of every watchman's dull, monotonous cry that smote her ears, she started and trembled with terror, remembering the brutal treatment she had received from the ignorant old ruffian from whom she had been rescued by poor Henry, and she hesitated which way to proceed.

"Oh, God," she exclaimed, in the bitterness of her anguish, "guilty though I have been, I merit not so cruel a fate as this, and oh, have mercy upon me. Heartless Selborne, surely if you could see me now, friendless, houseless, wretched, on this fearful night, you, even you must feel some degree of pity for your unfortunate victim."

She sobbed bitterly as these melancholy thoughts occurred to her, and the anguish of her mind increased rather than abated. Foolish, thoughtless as she was to leave Amy, with whom she might, at any rate, have found a temporary shelter, but it was now too late to regret, and it was absolutely



necessary that she should arouse herself into action, and endeavour to find some respectable lodging for the night; but to a young and inexperienced person like her in the streets of London, that was indeed a most difficult task, and she was at a loss how to set about it.

Commending herself, however, to the guidance and protection of providence, and conquering her fears as well as she could, she took the turning opposite to her, which seemed the likeliest, and proceeded anxiously on her way, but without perceiving anything to gratify her hopes.

The snow-storm increased in violence and the wind, if possible, blew more piercingly cold.

Unused as she was to exposure to the weather, poor Phoebe felt it the more keenly,

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and at times her limbs were so completely benumbed that they almost refused their office, and she could have cried with the cold, and then the utter cheerlessness of all around increased her anguish and despair.

Still she mustered more courage and resolution than might have been expected under the circumstances, and continued to wander on, she knew not whither, as well as her almost exhausted strength would permit her, and, after an hour had elapsed in this manner, she found herself on Blackfriar's Bridge, and still without having come to any decision as to the course she should pursue, or where procure a lodging for the night.

There were but few persons on the bridge, and they were hurrying on as fast as they could, through the snow, and seemed to take no notice of her.

She looked steadfastly down at the frozen waters and the most terrible thoughts came across her mind, which she endeavoured to dismiss as soon as possible. She could not but entertain a melancholy wish that she was for ever at rest in the bosom of that ice-bound river.

She sighed deeply, looked sadly at the dismal prospect before her, and then wrapping her cloak more closely around her shivering form, with a heavy heart she proceeded on her way till she reached the neighbourhood of Fleet-street.

Here a sudden faintness, like as though she was struck with death, came over her; her limbs failed her, her brain turned giddy, and she sunk down in a state of utter insensibility on the snow-covered pavement.

How long she remained in this deplorable condition she knew not, but when she was restored to sensibility, the change in her situation was of that extraordinary nature, that she could scarcely believe the evidence of her senses.

Instead of the dreary street, amidst the snow-storm and the howling wind, she found herself to her utter astonishment reclining on a warm bed, in a comfortable well-furnished chamber, and with two respectable females—who were evidently mother and daughter—in anxious attendance upon her.

On seeing her revive they expressed much pleasure and satisfaction, but motioned her to silence, as they probably thought that even the slight exertion of talking might injure her in her present delicate and exhausted condition.

But the astonishment and anxiety of Phoebe were so great, that she could not refrain from eagerly inquiring where she was, and to whom she was indebted for the humane attention which had been and was still being paid to her?

The elder female informed her that she was in the house of a respectable tradesman, whose wife she was, and that the young woman by her side was her daughter.

He had taken compassion on her, seeing her deplorable situation on his return home, and had rescued her from a brutal mob that had gathered round her, and taking her to be one of those unfortunate females who are driven on the streets to procure a disgusting living, and that she was in a state of intoxication, with many revolting observations were advising the guardians of the night to take her forthwith to the watch-house.

Mr. Osborne, however—which was the name of the tradesman—seeing at once that she was not one of that degraded class that the persons in the crowd supposed her to be, and also that she was suffering from illness and cold, immediately and kindly took charge

of her, and, being near his own residence, rang the bell, and had her carefully conveyed into the house, where she was placed under the kind care of Mrs. Osborne and her daughter, who did all that they could to restore her to sensibility, with what success has been shown.

Our heroine could with difficulty find any language which she thought was sufficiently strong to express her thanks for such unexampled kindness; but Mrs. Osborne assured her that she had done no more than the common laws of humanity demanded, and requesting her to make herself perfectly easy and to endeavour to get an hour or two's sleep—telling her to ring a small hand-bell which she placed on the bed, if she should require the attendance of herself or her daughter. She very considerably put no questions to her, as to who she was, and what singular circumstance had placed her in so unfortunate a situation, at such an unseasonable hour of the night; she and the young woman retired from the room, leaving Phoebe with mingled feelings of surprise and gratitude which may be readily imagined.

Her first task was to return her heartfelt thanks to providence for her merciful preservation from the horrors of that eventful night, and the fearful fate which probably would have befallen her had not Mr. Osborne kindly interposed to rescue her; and she then endeavoured in some measure to compose her feelings and to collect her thoughts, which, however, she found most difficult to accomplish.

The form of the guilty Lord Selborne was placed before her distracted imagination in the most painful point of view, and while she bitterly reproached him mentally for the cruel and treacherous part he had acted towards her, after all the solemn and oft repeated protestations he had made to her, scalding tears of anguish and regret chased each other down her pale cheeks, and her heart seemed ready to burst with the power of her emotions.

From her seducer the poor girl's most torturing thoughts wandered to the unfortunate Henry Ashford and his amiable sister, and terrible was the grief she felt at the cruel fate which had befallen him, at the very moment of their extraordinary and unexpected meeting.

Her present situation, too, notwithstanding she was thankful for the disinterested kindness which had been shown towards her, caused her considerable pain and uneasiness—the manner in which she had been discovered by Mr. Osborne, alone, and at such an hour of the night, must, she considered, make him and his wife look upon her with some degree of suspicion, and how could she

enter into the delicate explanation which they would probably require of her? Then the thought that she was, at the outset of her miserable career, compelled to be beholden to the kindness and benevolence of strangers caused her many feelings of pain and regret.

And what was to be her future course? How was she to act? What would become of her, friendless and almost destitute as she was? She racked her brain in vain for an answer to these questions, and the anguish of her mind increased, in spite of all her efforts to subdue it.

Dare she venture to return to that once happy home, which she had disgraced and rendered desolate by her conduct? Could she dare to meet her aged father in his loneliness and misery, and to brave his reproaches and probably his curses? There was madness, horror in the very idea, and her heart recoiled from it with emotions of agony which it is needless to attempt to describe.

These reflections crowded in rapid succession upon Phoebe's brain, and for some time rendered her incapable of composing herself to rest; but at length completely worn out with thinking and what she had to undergo, she did drop off into a disturbed sleep, which was not at all calculated to refresh her.

When she awoke it was morning, and Mrs. Osborne and her daughter were again in attendance upon her by her bedside, and inquired kindly after her health. Phoebe replied as she really felt, that she was very ill, and so weak that she feared she should be unable to rise from the bed.

Tears started to her eyes, as she pressed the hands of Mrs. Osborne and her daughter, and again returning her thanks, expressed her pain and anxiety at the inconvenience to which she must be putting them, at the same time asking Mrs. Osborne whether she could not be received into an hospital, or some such charitable asylum, as she feared from the symptoms which showed themselves that it might be some time ere she should be sufficiently recovered to proceed on her journey, and she could not think of becoming a burthen to those on whom she had not the slightest claim.

Mrs. Osborne, in terms of benevolence, which ought to have been sufficient to inspire her with every feeling of confidence, requested her to make her mind perfectly easy on that point, for that her husband and herself felt an interest in her fate for which they could not very well account, and that she was welcome to all the assistance they could render her, and that nothing should be wanting on their parts which might tend to alleviate her sufferings, or promote her recovery.

"Oh, madam," observed our heroine, in

tones of the greatest emotion, "such unprecedented kindness and humanity as this from those who are entire strangers to me, completely overwhelms me, especially when it is quite out of my power to repay it, and I fear you will deem me little deserving of it when you shall hear the truth. I am a wretched outcast, an alien—"

"Hold, my good girl," interrupted the kind-hearted Mrs. Osborne, "you had better not agitate or exhaust yourself by entering into any explanation for the present, at any rate; and I assure you I do not require it; your looks and manners convince me that any assistance or kindness it may be in my power to render you, will not be unworthily bestowed. But if you have no objection to reveal your name, it might be necessary."

Our heroine slightly hesitated, but fearing that she might excite some suspicion in the mind of Mrs. Osborne, and seeing that there was nothing unreasonable in the request, she replied that her name was Phoebe Mayfield, and that she was a native of Yorkshire, whither she was anxious to return as soon as her health would permit her.

Mrs. Osborne then accounted for the money and trifling articles of jewellery that her and her daughter had found upon her on undressing her, which Phoebe found to be quite correct, and again expressed her thanks in the warmest manner.

The fears of our heroine were unfortunately realised; her illness increased, and in the course of the day it assumed so serious and alarming a form that Mrs. Osborne thought it absolutely necessary to send for a medical man without delay, in spite of the objections which the poor girl raised to it; and before night she was in a high fever, and was quite light-headed, during which in her wild wanderings, she revealed sufficient of her melancholy history to enable Mrs. Osborne and her daughter to form a pretty shrewd idea as to the nature of the misfortunes she had experienced.

This revelation did not at all prejudice them against her, but, on the contrary, they sincerely pitied her unhappy fate, and redoubled their kind attentions of which she then stood so much in need.

Mrs. Osborne regretted that they had not inquired of her the address of her father or any other relations, for she thought it was necessary for them to be made acquainted with her present alarming condition, and if anything fatal should unfortunately happen to her, her and her husband would be placed in a very awkward and embarrassing situation.

In this dangerous state Phoebe remained for more than a week, when the disorder took a favourable turn, but her constitution

was so much impaired by what she had undergone that it was evident some time must elapse ere she would be restored to a perfect state of convalescence.

Her brain no longer wandered, and she was enabled to talk freely, and most fervently did she return her thanks to those kind friends to whom she was so greatly indebted.

From observations that accidentally escaped Mrs. Osborne and her daughter at different times in the course of conversation, she discovered that she had, in the moments of her delirium, disclosed some of the principle features of her history, and though she was pained and abashed to think she had done so, she considered that further concealment was quite unnecessary, and therefore as briefly as possible related the whole of the melancholy facts connected with her fate, and to which Mrs. Osborne and her daughter listened with the deepest interest and attention, and when she had concluded expressed their sympathy with her unmerited misfortunes, in language which bespoke at once their sincerity.

From that time they seemed to redouble their attentions to her, and to exert themselves to the very utmost to inspire her with hope and consolation, and when she was able to leave her chamber, Mr. Osborne received her with every kindness, and emulated his wife and daughter in the respect and sympathy he evinced towards her.

Phoebe felt this disinterested friendship and urbanity warmly and gratefully, and knew not how sufficiently to express her acknowledgments.

Not wishing to remain a burthen any longer on those to whom she was so much indebted, would now have taken her departure, promising to communicate with them immediately on her arrival in her native village; but this they would on no account whatever listen to or agree, until such time, at any rate, that her health was fully established. They had indeed become so much attached to her, from her amiable and gentle disposition that they would willingly had her make up her mind to remain with them altogether, or at any rate till something more favourable took place in her destiny; for they were in very prosperous circumstances, and could very well bear the additional expense in their family.

Such was the kind and considerate manner with which these excellent people behaved towards her, that our heroine soon became as much at home in their family as if she had been on intimate terms with them for many years. Her spirits somewhat revived, and her health rapidly improved, but such was her dread of meeting with Lord Selborne, Beaufort, or some of his lordship's

servants, that she did not venture to leave the house, and amused herself in reading, needlework, or in the agreeable society of her new friends.

But still her hopes, her thoughts, her wishes, all tenaciously clung to home and her aged father, and she constantly prayed to heaven that the time might soon arrive when she should return to her native village, throw herself at that dear parent's feet, and implore and receive his forgiveness.

After the most mature consideration, and consulting Mr. and Mrs. Osborne, she resolved to write to her father—notwithstanding she knew he could not read, but that he might get some one to peruse it for him—a letter of the most touching description, candidly informing him of the whole of the particulars that had befallen her since the fatal time she had abandoned home, of all that she had suffered, of her present situation, her sorrow and remorse; and imploring his forgiveness, and that he would again receive to his aged arms his penitent and still affectionate child.

How great was the anguish of her feelings, how many were the tears she shed, while writing this important epistle; but at length she completed her task and showed it to her friends, and they having expressed their approbation of the style in which she had written it, she immediately despatched it, with a fervent prayer to heaven that it would meet with a favourable result.

And now with what torturing anxiety and suspense did she await the expected answer, and various and conflicting were the thoughts—the doubts—the hopes and fears that racked her breast, and which all the endeavours of her friends failed to remove or to tranquilize.

A week passed away, and still she received no answer, and her anguish increased. Two more days elapsed, and still she was kept in the same state of suspense, of fear, and doubt, and uncertainty. It appeared that her father disdained to answer her, that he rejected her supplications—had discarded her from his heart altogether, or more terrible probability still, that he had sunk under his insupportable weight of misery and grief, and was dead.

This last idea was so fearful, that it almost drove her brain to madness, and it was in vain that Mr. Osborne and his wife tried to comfort her, and to banish it from her mind.

At length a letter addressed to her, and bearing the post-mark of her native village, did arrive, and with a wildly palpitating heart, and with mingled hopes and fears, she gazed eagerly at the superscription.

The hand-writing was perfectly unknown to her, but she was certain that the letter must be in answer to the one she had written

to her poor father, and, after some trembling hesitation, she broke the seal, when she found to her anguish and dismay, her own letter enclosed, with the following laconic answer written on the back of it.

"The writer of this is instructed to inform the person calling herself Phoebe Mayfield, that the wretched, heart-broken Mark Mayfield no longer acknowledges the abandoned being who brought her aged mother to an untimely grave, and disgraced his before unsullied name, and he curses the hour that brought her into the world."

No sooner had the distracted girl read these fearful and fatal lines, than she uttered a frantic cry of agony, horror, and despair, and sunk insensible in the arms of Mrs. Osborne.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ATTEMPTED SUICIDE.

It would be almost impossible to attempt to describe the deplorable state to which the unfortunate Phoebe was now reduced, and greatly did her friends commiserate her sufferings, and fearfully anticipate the consequences that would be almost certain to follow this total annihilation of her hopes. She was instantly conveyed to her chamber, and the medical man sent for, as they entertained doubts of their being able to restore her to her senses without his assistance.

For some hours the poor girl remained in a perfect state of unconsciousness, only at intervals, when some imperfect recollection of what had taken place seemed to flit across her distracted brain, when the mournful lamentations, and wild paroxysms of grief and despair which escaped her were quite pitiable and heart-rending to hear.

All that humanity could suggest to relieve her from her agonising sufferings, and restore her to some comparative degree of reason and tranquillity, was done by her amiable friends, but with very little or no effect, and the physician entertained very strong doubts whether or not she would ever regain her proper senses.

The following day, however, the violence of her sufferings had considerably abated, and at times she was enabled to talk with something like calmness, bemoaning her fate, and reproaching herself for her own rash and misguided conduct which had brought her to it. Then she would call piteously upon her father's name, and in imploring his forgiveness in the most melancholy and touching accents, gradually relapse into a state of frenzy and the most abject despair.

Mr. and Mrs. Osborne could not but consider that the father of Phoebe, probably through the ill-advice of prejudiced persons, was acting with undue severity towards her, but he was doubtless not master of his reason or he could never have come to the stern and unnatural determination to discard from his bosom his only, and, as they had every reason to believe, truly penitent child. Still they hoped that something would yet occur to move him to relent, and to receive the poor deserted one once more to his paternal arms.

With unremitting care and attention our heroine was enabled to battle with her feelings sufficiently to be able at length to leave her chamber, but painful indeed was the change which the last few days had wrought in her. The violence of her grief had now assumed the character of a settled melancholy, which was, if possible, still more sad to witness. The lustre of her eyes was dimmed—a heavy weight of care constantly seemed to sit upon her brow—her features were pinched and grief-worn, her cheeks pale and sunken, and never was a smile seen to play around her lips, as it was ever wont to do, when sorrow was a stranger to her breast.

She entered but little into conversation, and when she did so, her thoughts seemed to be entirely abstracted from the subject under discussion.

From this deplorable state her friends tried all that they could to arouse her. She was fully sensible of their disinterested kindness, and endeavoured to evince her gratitude, but alas, all their efforts were ineffectual in producing any marked or important result; and it seemed that all the hopes, the wishes, and the pleasures of the unfortunate girl were destroyed for ever.

It was only in the solitude of her own room, where there was no eye to behold her, save that of heaven, no one to listen to her dismal lamentations or to interrupt her, that the poignant, the almost insupportable anguish of Phoebe Mayfield was allowed free and unrestrained indulgence, and there indeed the intensity of her grief—as she pondered o'er the fatal past, and anticipated the dreary future—knew no limits.

What now was left to her but misery, despair, and death? Her father had cast her from him for ever; Henry Ashford and his gentle sister were lost to her, and she had no kindred from whom she could seek pity, advice or consolation. Truly was she now alone in the world, a wretched outcast, whom her fellow creatures must look upon with scorn, if not with absolute hatred.

And could she any longer remain a burthen to strangers? beholden to them for a shelter and the very means of existence? Every

feeling of independence and becoming pride revolted at the idea; and yet, when she hinted those thoughts to Mrs. Osborne and her husband, they met them with arguments such as she found it difficult to reply to, and would not for a moment listen to her proposal to leave them, and seek for some employment, however humble, while in her present state of mind, at any rate.

And, in this manner, another month wore away, without any change worthy of mentioning taking place. The melancholy of our heroine increased rather than abated, and it was all to no purpose that her benefactors endeavoured to divert her mind to other subjects.

Her malady sometimes assumed a character fast approaching insanity; and then, when she happened to be alone, the most terrible thoughts (among the rest that of self-destruction,) would crowd upon her disordered brain.

One evening, having excused herself to her friends, she retired at an early hour to her chamber, in the same dismal and dangerous state of mind as we have just described; and for some time she sat brooding upon different torturing subjects, but principally that almost constantly engrossing her thoughts.

She continued to reflect upon the horrors by which she was surrounded, until she had worked herself up to that pitch of excitement which was almost insupportable, when suddenly a heavy stupor crept over her senses, which she could not resist, and, after two or three vain attempts to shake it off, she threw herself, without undressing, on the bed, and soon became wrapped in a deep lethargy or sleep.

But the disordered state of her imagination was still at work, and conjured up visions of the most frightful description. At one time she thought herself wandering through the old churchyard at the solemn midnight, and following (with an irresistible impulse, o'er scattered mouldering bones and broken tombstones, which were rendered more awfully distinct in the sickly glare of the moonlight,) her mother's ghastly shade. It stopped at an open grave, where stood her father, looking stern and terrible, and to whom the spectre pointed with a look of horror and reproach fixed upon Phoebe.

The latter imagined, in her dream, that she endeavoured to speak—to pray—but could not; and the spectre seemed to mock her efforts, in which she was joined by the aged Mark, and at the same time all kinds of hideous noises sounded in the wretched Phoebe's ears, and seemed to bewilder and distract her senses, and grim and ghastly forms danced and fluttered around her, with

strange gestures, and motioned as if they were urging her to the perpetration of some desperate crime.

Then our heroine imagined that, worked up to a pitch of indescribable agony, after a vain effort to kneel to the spectre and her father, she stretched forth her arms imploringly towards them; but ironical and unearthly laughter saluted her ears, which, having subsided, she heard her father, in a fearful voice, every tone of which thrilled her soul with horror, thus address her:—

“Miserable, guilty being! curse to thyself and all who come in contact with thee, the only atonement thou canst make is to die! Perish, then, by thine own hand, and no longer pollute the earth with thine hated presence!”

Deafening peals of thunder shook the spot on which Phoebe was standing, as these awful words escaped the old man's lips; the spectre smiled ghastly, as if in approval of what he had uttered, and pointed to the open grave; innumerable phantoms danced around, and awful noises filled the air; flames of fire seemed to rise before the horrified Phoebe's eyes, and scorch her brain—and yet an icy chill, like that of death, was upon her limbs, and seemed to suspend all her faculties. Gradually everything faded from her sight, and all was buried in impenetrable darkness.

Shuddering in every limb, and in a state bordering upon frenzy, Phoebe awoke, and started wildly from the bed, with all the recollection of the appalling circumstances of the frightful vision strong upon her, and gazing vacantly around the room, scarcely able to persuade herself that what had occurred to her distracted imagination was not reality, and that she was not still in the old churchyard.

The fearful words uttered by her father, as had appeared to her in her dream, still seemed to ring in her ears, and to urge her on to something desperate. Horrible thoughts rushed upon her brain, and then her senses wandered.

“Curse to thyself and all who come in contact with thee, the only atonement thou canst make is to die Perish by thine own hands, and no longer pollute the earth with thine hated presence!”

These words she repeated to herself several times, and, as she did so, more dreadful became her thoughts, more alarming the feelings that prompted her.

“Yes,” she exclaimed, “wretch that I am—friendless, destitute, deserted by all—accursed of heaven and mankind—why, oh why should I continue to drag on this lingering life of misery! Let me longer hesitate—let me be firm in my awful purpose—this night, this very hour, shall terminate

the shame and the sorrows of Phoebe Mayfield."

There was a terrible expression in her eyes as she uttered these words, and the determination of madness and despair seemed to urge her on. She walked to the room-door, which she opened, and listened for a minute or two attentively. All was silent in the house (for the family had retired to rest earlier than usual,) and not a sound was to be heard without, save the moaning wind, as it swept along the deserted streets, or the dull voice of the watchman, as he cried, or pretended to cry, the hour.

Phoebe stopped no longer to think or hesitate, her mind was worked up to a pitch of fearful determination, frenzy held possession of her brain. The ghastly phantom of her mother seemed to point the way, and the words of her father to goad her on. Hastily she threw her cloak over her shoulders, quitted the room, and descended the stairs with noiseless footsteps, and a wildly palpitating heart, and the next moment she was hurrying along the street.

The night was very cold, and it snowed fast; but poor Phoebe took no notice of this as she hastened on her way as if instinctively towards Blackfriars Bridge.

Reason for the time being was entirely banished from her seat, and the hapless Phoebe had not the least control over her actions. Her mind had become a void, a blank, and but one dreadful idea impelled on to the perpetration of the rash and guilty deed she contemplated, and that was the fatal mandate which see imagined had been spoken by her father in her dream.

She seemed now to court death as the means of relief from sufferings that had become too terrible longer to endure, and every moment that delayed the execution of her awful purpose was marked by her with the greatest impatience.

It was past eleven o'clock, and the night being so cold and miserable, the streets were nearly deserted, except by females of the most depraved character, or by some drunken stragglers, now and then staggering on their way from the different taverns and dens of infamy in the neighbourhood, by whom our heroine was frequently accosted in the most vulgar and insulting language, which, however, at that time, in her distracted state of mind fell harmless on her ears.

The wretched woman reached the bridge, and all was cold, dark, and dreary. Piercingly cold indeed came the wind from the dark and muddy Thames, upon whose surface immense sheets of broken ice floated, and where a few gloomy coal-barges could be seen at intervals, and the moon looked sul-

lenly down upon all, through hazy, misty clouds.

The awful, fatal moment had arrived, and Phoebe having advanced a few paces on to the bridge, for a minute or two paused, and supporting herself against it, looked steadfastly into the cold and half-frozen waters.

And now for a minute a different feeling interposed between the wild tempest of passions that raged within her breast. Not that her courage—the courage of madness and desperation—failed her, no, but the light of reason again partially dawned upon her benighted brain, and she reflected upon the wickedness and the rashness of the awful crime she was about to commit, the crime of self-murder, to rush unbidden, with all her sins upon her head, into the presence of her Maker.

But it was only for an instant that she thus reflected; again the fearful words—"Perish by thine own hands, and no longer pollute the earth with thine hated presence," seemed to ring in her ears, and, with frantic speed, having thrown her cloak on the ground she rushed down the steps of the bridge, and without pausing another moment to reflect, or to utter one short prayer for mercy and forgiveness, the unfortunate Phoebe Mayfield precipitated herself into the water.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RESCUE FROM UNTIMELY DEATH, AND FURTHER SUFFERINGS OF PHOEBE.

At the time that our wretched heroine threw aside her cloak, and rushed down the steps of the bridge to the water's edge, a watchman was coming slowly along on the opposite side, who thought he saw something like a human form hurry away, but his eyesight being none of the keenest, he was unable to come to any decision in his own mind upon that point, until he crossed over, and stooping down, with the aid of his lantern, discovered the cloak on the ground, which confirmed his worst suspicions, and he instantly set to springing his rattle most desperately and shouting vociferously, "Murder! fire! thieves!" and anything and everything else but that which would accurately have described the cause of alarm or the nature of that which had taken place.

However, it had quickly one desired effect, namely, to bring together a mob of persons, all of whom most anxiously inquired what was the matter.

"A 'oman committed *fell in the sea* on herself," replied the watchman, holding up the cloak as a confirmation of his assertions, "a 'oman in the water."

The mob one and all took up the latter words in simultaneously joining in the chorus of "a 'oman in the water," rushed like so many mad people, helter-skelter down the steps, the watchman still continuing to spring his rattle most industriously, on the bridge, and flourishing the cloak as a proud trophy of his zeal and sagacity.

This tardy assistance would doubtless have been of little use, so far as the preservation of life was concerned, but fortunately our heroine had been rescued from an untimely death almost immediately after her immersion in the water, and was then being conveyed in an insensible state from the barge which was moored close by the steps, into the wharf to which it belonged.

Two men who happened to be on the barge, at that unseasonable hour, and were comfortably smoking their short pipes before a fire kindled in a portable grate, in spite of the weather, and for what purpose it is not important to inquire, caught a glimpse of the poor girl's form, and heard the splash as she threw herself into the water, and with a promptitude and presence of mind which did them great credit, they instantly flew to the rescue, although at that hour of the night, and under such circumstances, it was fraught with much danger.

Fortunately Phoebe rose again to the surface of the water almost immediately, and, still more fortunate, her clothes became entangled with a portion of the broken ice which was floating near the barge, and kept her from sinking again immediately.

The men instantly availed themselves of this opportunity, and, with much exertion and risk, and with the aid of a long boat or barge-hook which happened to be handy, they succeeded in dragging poor Phoebe from her critical and awful situation, and conveying her, as has been before stated, quite insensible, into the wharf, where a portion of the mob had now scrambled, and were followed by the watchman after he had fairly exhausted himself by vociferating, and springing his rattle.

A consultation was now held as to what it was best to do, (the lateness of the hour adding much to the difficulty) and various were the propositions made, among others a rather rough and not very delicate process of rolling on the floor in order to eject the water, another that she should be half smothered in great coats and blankets, to impart some warmth to herlimbs, and cause the recirculation of the blood; a third that she should be taken to the workhouse instanter, but the sagacious watchman demurred to all these proposals as impracticable, and wisely suggested that a doctor should be sent for, and desired to bring a stomach-pump, mustard

plasters to apply to the soles of her feet, a quantity of leeches, and a warmth-bath, without delay.

This, however, much to the disgust and indignation of the watchman, was overruled by the two men who had rescued her, deciding that the most prudent course, and one which was the likeliest to be attended with the most favourable results, was at once to convey her to the hospital, a hackney-coach having been procured for that purpose, and this suggestion was immediately acted upon, and in a few minutes more our unfortunate heroine, was receiving all the prompt attention that her precarious and deplorable situation demanded.

Short as her immersion had been in the water, long illness had so impaired her constitution, that her present recovery was rendered extremely doubtful. Indeed the medical gentlemen seemed to consider the case as almost hopeless, though that did not prevent them from using every effort that skill and humanity suggested for her recovery.

All the remedies usual in such cases were resorted to, but for some time with very little effect, the slightest pulsation of the heart alone giving signs, for several hours, that the hapless girl still lived.

In her pocket was found one of the address cards of Mr. Osborne, and the hospital authorities, supposing this to be some relation of the unfortunate being (with whose personal appearance all who saw her was deeply interested,) sent a messenger there without the least delay, to inform them of what had happened.

This was at an early hour of the morning, before any of the family had risen; and, on being aroused, and informed of what had taken place, they felt much surprised, yet, although the description given by the messenger so exactly corresponded with that of our heroine, that their fears and suspicions were naturally excited, and on hastening up stairs, and finding that the door was standing open, and Phoebe not in her chamber, their worst apprehensions were confirmed, and the grief of the kind-hearted Mr. and Mrs. Osborne was almost as great as if it had been their own daughter.

Mrs. Osborne and her daughter immediately accompanied the messenger to the hospital, and were ushered into the ward in which poor Phoebe was lying, still in a state of utter unconsciousness, and giving no sign of returning life.

The most unremitting attention had been paid to her, but at present with no other favourable result than that she breathed more freely; but the medical gentlemen feared, from the delicate state of her health previous to committing this rash act, that her ultimate



recovery from the effects of the terrible shock her system had received was, at best, very uncertain.

Mrs. Osborne and her daughter were greatly affected at the melancholy and lamentable situation of the ill-fated girl, and regretted that they had suffered her to sleep alone after the distracted state of mind into which the cruel and heart-rending result of her penitent letter to her father had thrown her.

Mrs. Osborne and her daughter seated themselves by the bedside of the sufferer, and watched her pale careworn features, and her wasted form—once redolent of every womanly grace—with feelings of the deepest regret, commiseration, and anxiety, and fervently they implored the mercy of the Almighty towards her, and prayed that she

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might speedily recover, so that something might be done to provide for her future necessities, and that she might have an opportunity of repenting of the dreadful and guilty act she had attempted, and which they had no doubt when she was restored to reason she would most sincerely do.

It was not, however, till towards the middle of the day, and when every remedy had been applied, that Phoebe showed any symptoms of returning life, and the reader may imagine the state of suspense with which her friends watched her recovery.

A heavy sigh first escaped her lips, followed by a shuddering convulsive movement of the limbs, and then she slowly opened her eyes, and looked around the place so strange to her, with a vacant stare which showed that her senses still wandered.

"Oh, thank heaven," exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, taking her thin hand in her's affectionately, and looking into her face with an expression of solicitude and the greatest sympathy; "Phoebe, dear Phoebe, my poor girl."

At the sound of her voice, which seemed to strike her ears familiarly, the patient started convulsively, and fixing her now unnaturally bright eyes wildly and earnestly upon her, she uttered a faint cry of agony, and immediately relapsed into insensibility.

She showed no signs of restoration to consciousness during the time that the hospital rules permitted her friends to remain, but still she appeared to be in a calm sleep, which her medical attendants and the nurses expressed an opinion might be productive of the most favourable results, and recommended that she should be kept as quiet and as free from excitement as possible.

Mrs. Osborne and her daughter left the unfortunate girl with much regret, but still with every confidence in the attention that would be paid to her, and satisfied with the promise that they should receive timely notice if any unfavourable change took place.

Phoebe remained calm and sleeping for two or three hours after the departure of her friends, and when she awoke seemed much better, but gazed with the greatest surprise and bewilderment to find herself surrounded by strangers, in a place that was equally strange to her, and eagerly inquired where she was.

She was assured that she was safe among friends, who would attend to her recovery, and told to keep herself quiet, and to suspend her curiosity and anxiety till she was in a better condition to be made acquainted with particulars.

This answer had the contrary effect it was desired it should have; it immediately awakened the recollection of her fearful dream, and the subsequent dreadful crime she had attempted to commit; all the horrors of her feelings were renewed, and, with a piercing shriek of indescribable agony, which re-echoed through the ward, and an hysterical laugh, which told the dreadful tale of the fatal malady that had seized upon her brain, she sank back on her bed inanimate.

When Mrs. Osborne and her daughter visited the hospital on the following morning they found the ill-fated Phoebe Mayfield a hopeless, raving maniac.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

The unfortunate malady of our heroine increased violently, and at the expiration of a few days, much to the grief of those who had so truly proved themselves to be her friends and benefactors, her case was considered hopeless, and that her senses had fled for ever.

It was indeed heart-rending to see one so young, so beautiful, and naturally amiable, reduced to such a melancholy and awful state, to behold so bright and happy a morn of life, apparently for ever obscured by the dark clouds of adversity, and to become lost to that society she was so well calculated by her numerous virtues to adorn.

Alas, how much had the guilty Lord Selborne to answer for, and how terrible must have been his feelings of anguish and remorse had he but known the awful condition to which his villany had reduced his hapless victim.

The hospital was now no longer the proper place for poor Phoebe Mayfield, and it was necessary that she should be removed without delay to a fit establishment for the treatment of such unfortunate cases.

It grieved the Osborne family greatly that she could not be placed under their immediate care; but they were compelled to submit, and in a few days more our heroine became the wretched inmate of a lunatic asylum.

Sincerely did her friends bemoan her dismal fate, the same as if she had been one of their nearest and dearest relations, and constantly did they pray to heaven that she might be restored to reason, and ultimately to prosperity and happiness.

Surely, they reflected, whatever her errors might have been, she had suffered for them most fearfully, most severely, and she had rendered all the atonement she could make; and it was not on her head but that of her base seducer that the heaviest weight of retribution should fall.

They had some idea of writing to his lordship and informing him of all the painful particulars that had taken place, and the present awful situation that his wretched victim was placed in; but considering that he would in all probability treat the letter, coming from perfect strangers to him, with indifference, and that after his cruel conduct to the poor girl, they had every reason to believe his heart to be invulnerable to pity or remorse, they abandoned all thoughts of doing so, especially as it was not at all unlikely, should Phoebe ever again be restored

to reason, that she would feel regret that they had written to him, or made any useless appeal to his humanity.

One thing, however, Mr. Osborne and his wife were fully resolved on, namely, to write to Phoebe's father, in as forcible yet feeling terms as possible, for they deemed it only right that he should know the fearful consequences which his too severe conduct towards his penitent daughter had produced, and to assure him not only of her sincere compunction, but that she had "been more sinned against than sinning."

They lost no time in carrying this resolution into effect, but although they waited anxiously for several weeks, the letter remained unanswered, and they naturally therefore concluded that the old man continued firm in his stern and cruel resolution, and had discarded all thoughts of his unfortunate daughter from his breast for ever.

Mr. and Mrs. Osborne did not fail to visit the afflicted Phoebe, at the lunatic asylum as often as it was allowed, and the deplorable and hopeless state in which they found her filled their breasts with the tenderest feelings of compassion and sympathy.

At first she was so violent that she was obliged to be kept under the severest restraint, but, as the keeper expressed it, "she was now quite harmless," and her malady had subsided into what is called "melancholy madness." She evinced something like pleasure at the presence of her friends, still she appeared to know them not, and it was in vain that they endeavoured to recal her scattered memory.

They were informed by the keeper that she seemed almost constantly wandering through some old church-yard, talking to the spirit of her mother, and repeating the supposed curses of her father.

Sometimes the name of her seducer would rise to her lips, and when it did so, her paroxysms became more violent and distressing.

At other times she would sing some simple country ballad which she had learnt in happier days in tones so touching and so plaintive, that it must have moved the most insensible heart to hear her, then she would relapse into tears and lamentations, which she would continue for hours together.

For a period of more than three months the poor girl remained in much the same melancholy condition, and it was now indeed thought that all chance of her ever regaining her senses was completely at an end; but suddenly to the agreeable surprise of all—although her treatment in the establishment had certainly been of the most excellent and skilful description—a change of the most favourable and unexpected character took

place. The light of reason once more gradually dawned upon her mind, all violent paroxysms ceased; and when Mr. and Mrs. Osborne and their daughter again called to see her, she knew them all, and greeted them in the most affectionate manner.

The scene which then ensued may be readily imagined; but fearful that it might be productive of different consequences to those that were desired, if prolonged, it was brought to as speedy a termination as possible, and the friends of Phoebe retired with hearts o'erflowing with feelings of sincere gratitude to providence for its infinite mercy.

Phoebe continued to improve so rapidly that in a few days she was considered sufficiently recovered to leave the asylum, and her friends were duly made acquainted with the same, and without delay they sought another interview with her, in order to make arrangements for her return to their residence.

They found the poor girl perfectly calm and rational, and their meeting was again of the most affectionate description. No allusion was made to the rash act she had committed, although she seemed to repent it deeply, and to be endeavouring to banish it from her memory.

Mrs. Osborne now proposed her departure from the asylum, and Phoebe seemed anxious to leave the melancholy place, though she hesitated to again become a burthen on their generosity and benevolence.

"I am already indebted to you, my kind friends, more, much more than I can ever repay," she said; "and why should I, stranger as I am to you—and I fear so little worthy of your regard—increase the obligation? Besides, why should I continue to eat the bread of idleness?"

"Talk not thus, Phoebe," returned Mrs. Osborne, "for it pains me to hear you. The delicate state of your health requires rest and careful attention. At any rate you must consent to remain with us until some arrangement can be made for the future."

"Be it so, my dear friend," said Phoebe, "and may heaven reward you and your husband for your kindness to the wretched outcast."

"We are sufficiently rewarded, Phoebe," said Mr. Osborne, "in the consciousness of having performed our duty towards an unfortunate fellow creature, and one who is so deserving of our esteem and friendly attention. Therefore, I beg of you to make your mind perfectly easy, and to banish from your thoughts all sense of obligation."

The tears of Phoebe, and the eloquent look she gave him, fully expressed her thanks, and they prepared to depart immediately from the asylum, our heroine most warmly and sincerely thanking the officials for their

humane attention to her during her unfortunate malady.

A hackney coach was procured, into which they stepped, and, as it was about being driven off, a faint exclamation of terror escaped Phoebe, and she pointed towards the pavement.

Surprised at her agitation, Mr. Osborne and his wife looked, and beheld the haggard form, and shrivelled, and repulsive features of an old woman, as she stood near the kerb, with a malicious grin upon her features, and her eyes seemingly fixed upon Phoebe.

It was the mysterious old gipsy sybil, as Mr. and Mrs. Osborne immediately guessed from the description which Phoebe had given them of her, and certainly nothing could possibly be more unwelcome than her appearance at that time.

The coach drove off, and, as it did so, they could hear the ironical laughter of the old woman, which was continued till the vehicle had out-distanced the sound of her voice.

This little incident had the most painful effect upon the spirits of our heroine, and notwithstanding the efforts of her friends it was some time before she could recover herself from the state of agitation into which it had thrown her.

"Alas," she sighed, "there is farther misery, some fresh trouble in store for me; that fearful and mysterious woman is ever the harbinger of some approaching evil. Oh, when will my miseries have an end?"

"Nay, Phoebe," replied Mrs. Osborne, "you are not weak and credulous enough, I am certain, to hold this aged impostor in superstitious dread. Banish her from your thoughts, or think of her, at any rate, only as she is, namely, a wandering gipsy vagrant pretending to that which no mortal ever possessed."

Phoebe shook her head, and her agitation seemed not at all abated.

"It is useless for me to treat this strange being with indifference," she observed, "especially when I remember how fearfully her former predictions have all been fulfilled."

"Do not give way, I beseech you," said Mrs. Osborne, "to such dismal thoughts, for in your present delicate state they might be productive of the most injurious effects."

Phoebe in compliance with the wishes of her friends, did struggle with her feelings as well as she could, and at length succeeded in subduing her emotions, though she could not conquer them entirely.

The coach soon stopped before the comfortable residence of Mr. and Mrs. Osborne, and our heroine re-entered that house in which she had before found a hospitable home in the midst of her greatest sorrows and misfortunes, with mingled emotions.

The meeting between her and the amiable Mary Osborne was one of the most affectionate and sisterly nature, and many and warm were the congratulations she bestowed upon her on her recovery.

For some days after her return from the asylum, Phoebe appeared calm and contented, and there was nothing which her friends and benefactors neglected, which they thought might contribute to her welfare and happiness, and they were not without hope that time would serve to ameliorate the violence of her grief, and that she would become resigned to her fate.

Their principal efforts were devoted to the amusement of her mind, and in endeavouring to divert her thoughts from the remembrance of her misfortunes, and with that view they kept her in their society as much as possible, supplied her with such books to peruse when alone as they thought would interest and instruct her, and, in fact, devoted the same anxious care to her as if she had been their own daughter.

Most grateful indeed did Phoebe feel for this kindness, and to satisfy them endeavoured to appear tranquil, and at times, even cheerful, but her thoughts and feelings were little in unison with that which she assumed; retrospection and melancholy anticipation of the future ever kept her sorrows uppermost in her mind, and the cankerworm of care was constantly preying upon her heart.

She felt the deepest remorse for the rash act she had committed, but when she reflected upon the terrible events that had driven her to it, the many sufferings she had already undergone, and those she too probably had yet to experience—the base conduct of Lord Selborne, the misery it had brought upon her aged parent's head, and that he had banished her from his heart, disowned, and probably daily, hourly invoked heaven's curses upon her—her brain was distracted, and she could not but give herself up to the most poignant anguish and despair.

Such were the feelings that constantly agitated her breast when alone, and she could give unrestrained indulgence to them, and, notwithstanding she tried all that she could to conquer them, lest they should again reduce her to that deplorable state from which she had so recently recovered.

Again she felt the most unconquerable desire to return to that native village home from which she had been so long estranged; to seek the presence of her father, and, throwing herself at his feet, implore his forgiveness, and surely when he again beheld her, and heard from her own lips how cruelly she had been betrayed, and all that she had suffered, he must, he would relent, receive her again to his heart, and thus enable her

by her future conduct to show the sincerity of her penitence.

"Oh, yes," she would observe, as these thoughts and wishes arose to her mind, "the poor old man cannot surely remain inexorable. He will not reject the supplications of his much wronged and broken hearted child, who ever loved him with the fondest, the most fervent affection of a daughter. But should he indeed turn a deaf ear to me and refuse again to acknowledge me, I shall at least have had the melancholy satisfaction of once more gazing on his venerable features ere I die, which then I will do upon my poor mother's grave beneath the old yew-tree.

Sobs choked her further utterance, and her tears flowed fast, as she thus dismally reflected; and she gave free vent to her grief.

She expressed her wishes to Mr. Osborne and his wife, at length, and they heard her with sorrow and regret, for they could not but contemplate a separation probably for ever, from one to whom they had now become as warmly attached as if she were their own daughter, with the most painful emotions. But they saw too plainly that her resolution was fixed, and therefore no longer attempted to dissuade her, though they urged her to defer her departure for a few weeks, until she might have recovered health and spirits sufficient to undertake so long a journey, and all the necessary arrangements might be made for that purpose.

To this our heroine of course assented, and she looked forward to the time of her departure from London—which the misfortunes that had attended her now rendered hateful—with the greatest anxiety, but at the same time with feelings of melancholy regret, at the prospect of a separation from those friends to whose unexampled and disinterested kindness she was so much indebted.

But unforeseen and unfortunate circumstances were about to occur to hasten her departure, and to excite the deepest feelings of sorrow and sympathy in her breast.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ADVERSITY OVERTAKES THE FRIENDS OF
PHOEBE.—HER DEPARTURE FROM LONDON.

Melancholy was the change that suddenly took place in the affairs of the Osborne family. Misfortune came upon them as severe as it was unexpected, and which at once reduced them from a state of prosperity—the just reward of years of industry and perseverance—to actual poverty.

There were first serious losses in business, these were followed by a monetary crisis, which ruined hundreds, and the breaking of banks—among others that in which nearly the whole of Mr. Osborne's capital was deposited—and he found himself nearly beggared, and no longer in a condition to support the extensive establishment in which he had for many years transacted so profitable a business.

It was a terrible blow, and it required all the energy of Mr. Osborne to bear it with any degree of fortitude and resignation.

Most sincerely and heartily grieved was Phoebe at these sad reverses in the fortunes of those for whose welfare and happiness she was so anxious, and whom she had so much reason to esteem; and she was at a loss in what language to endeavour to afford them some degree of consolation.

One thing was now certain, that her departure from London must be precipitated, for, in their present unfortunate circumstances, it was impossible that she could any longer remain a burthen to them; and an early day was fixed for her to commence her journey, and under circumstances of the most cheerless and discouraging description.

The money which Phoebe had in her possession on her being first introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Osborne, remained untouched, and she imagined it would be amply sufficient to cover the expenses of her journey, which she had resolved to manage with the strictest economy.

Limited as their means now were, Mr. and Mrs. Osborne would willingly and generously have contributed something towards her expenses, but Phoebe would on no account listen to this proposition, which she felt most gratefully and ardently.

The day of separation arrived, and a mournful one indeed it was to all who were interested in it. Phoebe was deeply affected and the sorrow of those from whom she had experienced such true benevolence, and who had learnt to look upon her as one of their own family, may be readily imagined, especially when they reflected upon the improbability of their ever meeting again.

Phoebe promised to communicate with them immediately after her arrival at the end of her journey, and as often afterwards as possible, and she assured them that she should never cease to remember them with the most unbounded feelings of gratitude and esteem; at the same time she expressed the most sanguine hopes that they would yet meet again, and she also sincerely and fervently trusted that she should shortly have the happiness of hearing that fortune had once more smiled upon them.

They saw her to the coach-office, where,

bidding each other a long and sorrowful farewell, they separated, and Phoebe commenced her long and tedious journey as an outside passenger; and with varied feelings of hope and fear agitating her breast.

When she thought of the distance she had to travel, her lonely and unprotected situation, and the uncertainty of her reception on reaching the place of her destination, her heart almost misgave her, and she could not but tremble at the painful and arduous task which had devolved upon her.

She was the only female passenger outside the coach, and she thought that her male companions eyed her with vulgar curiosity or suspicion, and she scarcely knew what she replied, when one or the other of them addressed some observation to her.

The weather fortunately, however, was remarkably fine and mild, for which Phoebe felt thankful, for she could not afford to ride inside.

The coachman was one of the old school of that fraternity, rough in manners, burly in person, and not over scrupulous in point of principle. He seemed to entertain very few ideas beyond horseflesh or the road, and those he not unfrequently expiated upon as they proceeded; not much to the amusement of our heroine, who, however, was too busily occupied with her own sad and painful thoughts to pay much attention to the conversation that took place.

At the end of the first stage of the journey they took up another passenger, a respectably dressed man, who wanted to ride inside, but being told that there was no room, he took his seat by the side of Phoebe on the roof.

Our heroine felt timid and uncomfortable from the very moment that this man joined them, for there was a boldness in his personal appearance and manners which was far from prepossessing.

He was a man apparently about thirty, with a sinister expression of features, dark restless eyes, and huge whiskers, and there was a constant leer or grin playing around his mouth which was particularly disagreeable to look upon.

He had not been many minutes by the side of Phoebe, when, after staring rudely in her face, he addressed some observations to her in tones of the greatest familiarity, and endeavoured to engage her in conversation, but she evaded his questions as well as she could, and tried to shift further away from him, but in vain, and the impudent stranger seemed determined not to be repulsed, and continued his advances with the most insolent pertinacity.

He seemed to fancy himself a wit, and made use of two or three vulgar and ribald

jest, which shocked the ears and added to the uneasiness of our heroine, but elicited from the other travellers loud peals of laughter, which encouraged the stranger in his insolent and unmanly behaviour, and placed poor Phoebe in a situation of the most embarrassing and alarming description.

At length, however, unable any longer to restrain her feelings of disgust and indignation, in a voice, and with a look sufficient to abash any but the most ignorant and reckless of individuals, Phoebe said—

“If you possess the feelings of a man and a gentleman you will desist from these impertinent advances towards an unprotected female, sir; your conduct is disgraceful, and if there was any one present possessing the least spark of manhood they would surely resent it.”

This speech was received with loud laughter at the expense of poor Phoebe; and she saw plainly that she had nothing to expect from the protection of her companions.

“Bravo—bravo! my pretty little spitfire; you look charming when in a passion, and your bright eyes flashing with indignation. She’s a fascinating creature, eh, my friends? and egad, she’s got some mettle about her too.”

“Yes,” replied the coachman, “but summut like my old grey mare, Peg—I fancy she’s rather restive at times. But you mustn’t mind a joke, young ’oman, it all serves to lighten the tediousness of the journey, you know.”

“I am alone, and not disposed for conversation,” returned Phoebe, “besides I do not understand the insulting jokes, as you are pleased to call them, that you have uttered. You are all of you strangers to me, and I cannot submit to the liberties you are taking with me.”

“Now, my dear,” said the man who was the principal aggressor, and with an obstinate determination which was really quite intolerable, “what’s the use of getting out of temper. Lord love your pretty face, which is perfectly covered with crimson blushes, and that make you look handsomer than ever, there’s not the least harm intended, and, as you are all alone, one would think that a little social conversation would be agreeable to you. I love and admire the sex, and I like to be pleasant and gallant on all occasions.”

“If you would indeed appear so, sir,” returned our heroine, pointedly, “you will immediately desist from your present conduct, and no longer annoy me. Surely you do not evince your feeling or good sense by it.”

“What a provoking little creature,” he

said; "but Harry Rattleton is not to be repulsed so readily. I declare I must steal one honeyed kiss from those tempting, pouting, ruby lips."

And in spite of the cries and resistance of the disgusted and indignant girl, he carried his threat into execution, amid the renewed laughter of the other passengers, and in which the fat coachman joined most boisterously.

Our heroine now felt the embarrassment and danger of her situation most acutely, and she shuddered to think of the terrible annoyances to which she was likely to be subjected during the long and tedious journey, if this abandoned man was unfortunately proceeding all the way.

"Ruffian!" she exclaimed, mustering up all the resolution she could, and her bosom swelling with resentment, "have you no pity for a poor girl, whose spirits are worn down and broken by the severest troubles?"

"Humph, halt—humph," said the fellow, with an impudent leer and significant look; "unfortunate, eh? Ah, well, I see; it's the old story again. Love and treachery, eh? Confiding woman and deceitful man, eh? Ah, well, it's a bad job, but it can't be helped, and what's the use of taking it to heart in this manner? If one lover has played you false, you should look out for another, and that would show that you have a becoming spirit about you. Now, what do you say to me? I'm free and independent, with plenty of money, lots of love, and one of the prettiest little estates in Yorkshire. My former lady, who is a most charming creature, has taken it into her head to abandon me, and to elope with Jack Marsham, of the guards. So you see I am at perfect liberty to take another. Now I think that you and I would agree admirably, when we understand each other better, so only say the word, and it's a bargain."

"And a capital match, too," remarked the coachman, "a capital match."

"Oh, God," ejaculated poor Phoebe, "must I endure this? Is there not one among you who will interpose to save the feelings of a helpless woman from being thus cruelly wounded?"

This appeal was only met with laughter and derision, and Phoebe gave herself up to anguish and despair. She could never proceed on her journey in company with such heartless ruffians as those she now found herself among; and yet to abandon the coach, after having gone so short a distance, would put her to the most terrible inconvenience and unexpected expense, and she was completely bewildered how to act for the best.

Mr. Harry Rattleton, as he had called

himself, continued the same unmanly and disgusting conduct, in spite of Phoebe's tears, supplications and remonstrances; and it was evident that he took her for some lost, degraded creature, whom he was at liberty to insult to any extent, and whose apparent modesty and indignation was all pretension and affectation.

She now perceived the full extent of the danger and difficulty of the task she had undertaken, and she shuddered to think of the troubles and miseries to which she might yet be exposed.

The coach at length again stopped at a road-side inn to change horses, and for the travellers to obtain some refreshment, and here Phoebe hoped to rid herself of her troublesome companion, if she could only induce the coachman or guard by the offer of a fee, she scarcely cared what, to permit her to get inside the coach.

The men alighted, and our heroine was about to follow, when Mr. Rattleton, who seemed determined to persist in his hateful attentions to her, officiously stepped forward to render his assistance, and she shrunk back disgusted and alarmed. It was of no use, however, her repelling him, he would not be disappointed in his intentions, and taking her hand he led her from the coach, and then boldly encircling her waist with his arm in spite of her cries and resistance, he endeavoured to force her into a room at the back of the inn, where he declared that she must have a glass of wine with him, and they could talk matters over alone, during the short time allowed before the coach was ready to start again.

"Come, come, my dear," said the brutal profligate, "you have played your part admirably so far, but it is now time that you ceased this nonsense, and that we should properly understand each other."

"Villain!" exclaimed the blushing and terrified Phoebe, trying in vain to release herself, "oh, is there no one who will stand forward in my defence?"

"To be sure not," replied Rattleton, with a scornful laugh, "do you think that there is any one here who is silly enough to interfere with that which does not concern them? Come, there is no time for delay for the coach will soon be ready to start again."

Phoebe screamed, and struggled with him, but her strength was almost exhausted, when at that moment a stout muscular waggoner, who a few minutes before had stopped with his team at the inn, rushed forward to her assistance.

"Why, thou be'st a cowardly vagabond to serve a poor young creature in this manner," said the honest countryman, "hands off, thou infernal scoundrel, or dang me if I don't

break ev'ry bone in that precious carcase o' thine."

As he thus spoke, he seized Rattleton roughly by the collar, hurling him to the ground, and took Phoebe under his protection, who, overpowered by her terrors, and the exertions she had undergone, fainted in his arms, and was by him, with the consent of the landlord and his wife, conveyed into a private room of the inn; Rattleton, much discomfited, enraged, and disappointed, gathering himself to his feet, but not daring to follow.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE TROUBLES OF PHOEBE INCREASE.

It was some time before our heroine with the assistance of the hostess, recovered, and when she did so, she learnt to her dismay that the coach had started, and that she was thus placed in a dilemma from which she knew not how to extricate herself.

She appealed to the landlady, who seemed to be a kind-hearted woman for advice, and she was then informed that there would not be another coach stop at the inn till the following morning, and Phoebe's means would not allow her to incur this additional expense; she therefore had no other alternative than to pursue the remainder of her long and weary journey on foot, from the idea of which she shrunk with feelings of the utmost dread, alone and unprotected as she was.

She wept bitterly at the thoughts of her deplorable situation, and the worthy hostess deeply and warmly sympathised with her, and tried to console her in the best manner she could.

At that moment, Ralph Dobson—which was the name of the waggoner who had rescued Phoebe from the fellow Rattleton knocked at the room-door, and requested permission to enter "to inquire how the poor young creature was, after her fright," and Phoebe was glad to see him that she might return him her thanks for the service he had rendered her.

Encouraged by the simplicity and honest warmth of his manner, our heroine at once explained to him the awkward and painful difficulty in which she was placed, and even ventured to ask his advice.

"Well, it is a bad job to be sure," he replied, "for it be a main long journey for any one to have to make on foot, 'specially a young 'oman. But I tell you what, miss, I ha' got to proceed some miles on the road to-morrow, and if you ha' no objection to ride in my waggon, I will gladly convey you,

and you will be quite safe there, and I will charge you nothing for it."

Phoebe warmly thanked him for his kind offer, and immediately accepted it, and glad to stop for the night at the inn, to rest herself, and to endeavour to collect her thoughts, and to consider how it would be best for her to proceed.

"I shall start at daylight in the morning, miss," said Ralph, "so you will be ready to accompany me?"

Our heroine replied in the affirmative, and having again expressed her thanks to him for his kindness, he retired from the room.

She then endeavoured to compose her feelings, and to partake of some refreshment, of which she stood in need, and after which, and some conversation with the hostess, she was at her request conducted to a clean and comfortable chamber, where she quickly retired to bed.

Oppressed by harrassing thoughts and reflections upon what had occurred, it was some time before she could compose herself to sleep; and she could not but anticipate the future with dread and foreboding, limited as were her means, and the distance she had to travel.

She awoke at an early hour the following morning, and recollecting what Ralph had told her, namely, that he would resume his journey by daylight, she immediately arose and dressed herself, feeling much refreshed by her night's rest.

Soon afterwards a servant made her appearance, and informed her that her mistress was awaiting her below, and that Ralph Dobson would soon be in readiness to depart.

Phoebe therefore immediately accompanied the girl down stairs, where she found the hostess, who, though early as the hour was, had already prepared a comfortable repast of which she invited her to partake previous to commencing her journey.

Our heroine thanked her heartily for her kind consideration, and complied with her request, and by the time she had finished her meal, Ralph made his appearance to inform her that he was ready to depart. She then inquired of the landlady what she was indebted for the kind accommodation she had afforded her?"

"Nothing, my poor girl," replied the good woman, "you are heartily welcome to all you have received from me. God forbid that I should take a farthing from one who can so ill-afford it."

Phoebe was overwhelmed by this generosity, and knew not how to return her thanks, but the landlady interrupted her, and wishing her safe at the end of her long journey, saw her into the waggon, which she had all to herself, and it then slowly left the inn.



It was a tedious method of travelling, but Phoebe was satisfied with it, as she was no longer exposed to danger and the insults of such abandoned wretches as Harry Rattleton, and she could never feel sufficiently thankful to the worthy Ralph Dobson—who jogged merrily along, whistling by the side of his team—for his kind interposition in her behalf, and the assistance he was now rendering her.

But the prospect before her was dreary enough, the many miles she had to travel alone, and with such a scanty allowance of money, and then the anguish and disappointment she might have to endure should she ever reach her native village. Her heart sickened at the thoughts that would thus crowd upon her brain, and her courage almost forsook her.

No. 14.

They stopped two or three times during the day to refresh themselves and bait the horses, and Phoebe had the greatest difficulty to persuade Ralph to allow her to pay for anything; in fact, the humane conduct of this humble individual throughout, was such as to excite the liveliest sentiments of gratitude and esteem in the poor girl's breast, and she felt the deepest regret when the time came when they must separate, as Ralph's way to the place of his final destination lay in a different direction to that which our heroine had to pursue.

This, however, did not happen till the shadows of evening were fast falling upon the earth, and they had travelled a much farther distance than, from the sluggish pace at which a waggon invariably proceeds, might have been expected.

Ralph, in his honest, simple way, expressed his regret on parting with Phoebe, wished her God-speed on her weary and tedious journey, and having given her some necessary instructions as to the road she should proceed, he turned into a lane on the right, and our heroine found herself alone.

Sad were the feelings that reflection created. She paused for a brief while in doubt and bewilderment. She looked around her, and endeavoured to take courage, for there was an open and romantic country before her, and all things looked cheerful.

Besides, the rest she had had in the wagon all the day, had greatly invigorated her, and she determined to proceed as far as she could in the cool of the evening.

She met with but few persons on her way, a peasant or two returning from his daily labour, and as no one offered to interrupt her, she became more at ease and confident.

Her means were indeed limited, but she hoped that, with economy they would be sufficient, and the hope of again being restored to her father, and effecting a reconciliation with him, urged her on.

Her adventure with the impudent libertine, Mr. Harry Rattleton, as he called himself, was unfortunate, for had it not been for that she would at this time have been a great way towards the end of the journey, and it would have saved her both fatigue, anxiety, and expense. However, it was useless to regret, and she therefore tried to banish the remembrance of it, and to prepare herself to act with firmness through all she might have to undergo in the course of her journey.

Having travelled some miles through a pleasant part of the country, intersected here and there with clean and pretty villages, and handsome gentlemen's seats, and it being now nine o'clock at night, Phoebe thought of looking for some respectable though humble place of rest till the morning, and, after walking some little distance farther, she alighted on a lonely cottage, though of neat and inviting appearance, and from the casement of which the glimmer of a light might be seen, which indicated that the inmates had not yet retired to rest; and there she therefore resolved to inquire where she could procure a lodging for the night.

She knocked rather timidly at the door, and, after a brief pause, a female voice from within demanded who was there, and what they wanted?

Phoebe simply replied that she was a poor woman who had travelled many miles, and that she wished for information where she might procure a cheap and respectable accommodation for the night.

The door was immediately opened by a respectable-looking middle-aged woman, who

having surveyed Phoebe narrowly, and being apparently satisfied with her looks, invited her civilly into the cottage, where a young woman was seated, who, from her likeness, our heroine immediately concluded was the elder one's daughter.

They invited her to be seated, and Phoebe, who felt encouraged by their manners, and the clean and comfortable aspect of the place, readily complied, and briefly explained the nature of her situation, and what it was that she required.

"Poor thing," said the woman, kindly, "I am afraid from your appearance that matters have not gone very prosperously or happily with you of late."

"Alas," sighed our heroine, "they have not. I have indeed had more than my share of the sorrows and misfortunes to which humanity is subject, and heaven only knows what are yet in store for me. But I feel fatigued, and require rest; can you direct me to any place where I may obtain it?"

The cottager paused for a minute or two; she then drew her daughter aside, and held a short conversation with her in a low voice.

"It is a matter of three miles from here to the nearest inn," she said at length, addressing herself to Phoebe, "and I am afraid that you would not there obtain the accommodation of which you stand in need. Inns at any time are not the safest or most proper places for an unprotected female. But I have a proposal to make—and which I do in all good will—which perhaps may meet your approbation."

"I pray you name it, my good woman," replied Phoebe, eagerly, "and I shall feel obliged to you for any suggestion you may be pleased to offer."

"You see," observed the woman, "my husband and son are labouring men, who are at present at work on a job which is some miles from home, so they can only come here once a week. If, therefore, you can put up with such humble accommodation as I have to offer you, for the night, or longer, if you like, you are heartily welcome."

Phoebe warmly returned her thanks for this kind offer, and the manner in which it was made, and readily accepted it. The cottager and her daughter then placed before her some refreshment, of which she sparingly partook, and after a short time passed in conversation, in the course of which Phoebe elicited some useful information to assist her on her long journey, she was shown into a comfortable and extremely clean little chamber adjoining that in which the elder female and her daughter slept, and, having wished her a good night's rest, they retired from the room, and left her to herself.

The first thing which our heroine did was

to return her devout and solemn thanks to the Supreme for having so far watched over her safety, and her spirits revived.

The following morning she arose fully prepared to resume her journey, being much refreshed by her night's rest, and, on entering the little parlour, she found the cottager and her daughter busy in getting ready the breakfast, and they inquired kindly after her health and how she had rested; in fact, they seemed to look upon her with the interest and respect as if they had known her for years, although they expressed no vulgar or idle curiosity to be made acquainted with the circumstances that had placed her in the apparent unfortunate situation in which they now saw her.

Breakfast over, Phoebe again most heartily acknowledged the obligation she was under to them for their kindness, and then prepared to depart, having first requested the cottager to inform her what recompense she could make for the accommodation she had received at their hands.

The good woman would have persuaded her to remain another day and night at the cottage to thoroughly recruit herself as she looked weak and ill; but Phoebe, who felt anxious to proceed on her journey without any more delay than was absolutely necessary, declined to do so.

They would not accept of any remuneration for the favours she had received from them, to which they assured her she was heartily welcome, and after many good wishes and some further instructions, Phoebe left the cottage.

She proceeded—lighter of heart than she had been since she had left London, and those benevolent friends whom she must always remember with feelings of the most unbounded gratitude and esteem—with all the speed she could, in the early part of the morning, and accomplished some distance without anything particular occurring to her, but the day became oppressively hot, and that necessarily retarded her progress, as she was frequently compelled to stop and rest herself.

During this time her mind wavered between hope and fear, and she could not entirely banish the gloomy misgivings and forebodings that ever and anon arose to her imagination.

The great distance she had yet to travel ere she could arrive at the end of her journey, greatly daunted her. She feared that her strength must fail her—unused as she was to such extraordinary exertion—ere she could accomplish it; and that her means would be exhausted. However, she endeavoured to bear up against every difficulty, and to trust in the goodness and mercy of

providence to carry her through her arduous task.

That night she was again fortunate enough, at a trifling expense, to obtain a lodging in one of the cottages of a village in which she arrived before dark, and the next morning, refreshed, once more resumed her journey.

The fifth day of her weary wandering arrived, and found her weak and nearly exhausted, and without having accomplished but very little more than half of the distance. She felt ill, and her fortitude began to fail her, but still she tried to arouse herself, and to persevere, and to a certain extent she succeeded; although it was quite evident that, if she was able to bear up till she reached the place of her destination, it would be little short of a miracle.

"All-merciful God," she exclaimed, as tired and spiritless, she was compelled to stop for a few minutes and support herself against a tree which grew by the roadside, "I humbly implore Thee not to forsake the poor, wretched, wandering outcast in this the most terrible hour of her need. Oh, give me strength to bear up against that fatigue of body and mind, which nearly overpowers me, and enable me to reach the once happy scenes of my childhood, and once more to behold that beloved parent, whom yet I tremble to meet; to hear his lips pronounce my pardon, and then if it be Thy will, to die. Alas—alas, sad and awful is my fate, and terrible indeed is the punishment for my errors, but oh, grant me this prayer, and I shall be content and comparatively happy."

Heavy clouds had for some time darkened the horizon, threatening a storm, and as the poor girl uttered these words, a peal of thunder reverberated above, and presently the forked lightning darted its fury against the angry sky, and the rain descended in torrents.

The situation of the hapless Phoebe was now most deplorable, for the road she was pursuing was a long and lonely one, and, as far as her eyes could stretch, she could not perceive the least signs of a human habitation, or any place which was likely to afford her shelter from the tempest's fury.

Her heart sunk with melancholy and despair, and wrapping her cloak around her as well as she could, to shield her as much as possible from the rain, with feeble steps she slowly wandered on her way.

The storm every moment increased in violence, and seemed likely to continue for hours, so that nothing possibly could be more dismal and painful than the situation of Phoebe, the agony of whose feelings may be readily imagined.

She was soon completely drenched to the skin, and so faint and exhausted that she

feared it would be almost impossible for her to proceed much further, in fact, she was now almost ready to sink down upon the earth.

The further she was enabled to proceed, the more dreary and hopeless her prospects seemed to become. The road appeared interminable, and nothing but long ranges of fields—without a human dwelling, or any other place where she could seek refuge from the storm—met her gaze on either side. She could see no one either who might direct her, the whole part of the country she was traversing seemed to be deserted, and indeed it was not likely that any one but those who were compelled to do so, would expose themselves to the violence of such a tempest.

“Gracious heavens!” cried the distracted Phoebe, clasping her hands together in agony, and shuddering with horror as the fierce lightning darted around her, and the loud thunder seemed to shake the very earth beneath her feet, “what will become of me in such a frightful storm as this, and weak and exhausted as I am from long suffering and over exertion? My heart is deadly sick, and my trembling limbs cannot possibly support me much farther. There is no help at hand, and here then must I shortly perish. And must I meet with an awful fate like this? Merciful God, oh, look down with pity and save me.”

Still more fiercely the angry elements battled with each other, and more terrible became the condition of the unfortunate Phoebe, who, wet to the skin; shivering and miserable, felt as if she must sink on the earth every minute.

But in the most extraordinary manner she struggled on, and had traversed a considerable distance of the road, when, between the pauses of the thunder, she fancied she heard the sound of footsteps, and the murmuring of voices behind her.

She paused, and listened with breathless attention. The sounds became more distinct, and she was certain that she was not mistaken. She looked anxiously back, and a flash of lightning revealed to her the forms of two men who were coming quickly along the road towards her.

This inspired her with some small portion of hope, though it was not unmingled with doubt and fear, ignorant of course as she was of the character of the men.

However, she anxiously awaited their approach, and she was not kept long in suspense, for they soon arrived at the spot on which she was standing, and she then perceived that they were dressed in the garb of labourers, and were doubtless making the best of their way home out of the tempest.

They seemed surprised on beholding our

heroine—and wretched indeed she looked—but she marked that their countenances expressed pity, and that revived her hopes and inspired her with confidence, and in an agitated voice she implored them to direct her to some place where she might rest her weary limbs, and find a shelter for the night from the storm.

“Poor lass,” observed one of them, in a voice of kindness and sympathy, “you are indeed in a sad plight, and this is a night which it is not fit for a dog to be out in. The nearest place of shelter is the old Ploughshare Inn, which is about a quarter of a mile further along the road, and no doubt you will be able to obtain every accommodation there. It is all in our way home, and therefore, if you like, we will conduct you there.”

“Oh, thanks, thanks for this,” said Phoebe, a weight of fear and anxiety removed from her breast at the prospect of relief; “and yet,” she added, in a faint voice, “I know not how I shall ever accomplish that short distance without assistance.”

“If you will accept our arms,” replied the man, “we will support you there.”

To this—once more returning her thanks—Phoebe gladly assented, and supported by the two men whom she had thus so fortunately met with, was conducted along the road in the same direction in which she had been going, and they had not advanced many paces, when she perceived lights that doubtless proceeded from the windows of the inn to which they were bent; and very shortly afterwards, much to the satisfaction of our heroine, who could not possibly have proceeded much further, they arrived at it.

The men led her into the parlour of the inn, where the host and hostess were seated, and to whom they seemed to be well known, and Phoebe sunk in a chair, and nearly fainted.

The landlord and his wife seemed much astonished and affected at the wretched appearance of our heroine, but more especially in the company of the men, who, however, quickly explained the facts, and Phoebe had only strength sufficient to thank them and implore the compassion and assistance of the landlord and his wife, when she fainted away.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE OLD BARN.—THE THIEVES.

The two men retired to another room to refresh themselves, and to await till the storm should have ceased or somewhat abated, and the innkeeper and his wife took the

readiest means to revive our unfortunate heroine.

These praiseworthy efforts were shortly crowned with success, and Phoebe recovered sufficiently to express her thanks for the attention that had been so promptly paid to her, and to request that she might be accommodated with a lodging for the night, and conducted to a chamber as soon as convenient.

This was readily complied with, and Phoebe having taken a small quantity of hot brandy and water that had been prepared for her, was conducted by the hostess and a female servant to a chamber, where she was quickly stripped of her wet clothes, placed in a warm bed, and every care and attention paid to her that her situation required.

Phoebe had but little rest during the night, and she felt so ill in the morning that she was certain it would be impossible for her to continue her journey that day—although the storm had entirely ceased and the weather was again fine—and she therefore requested the landlady to be permitted to remain, to see what effect a day's rest would have in recruiting her exhausted strength, and in some measure restoring her health, at any rate, to enable her to proceed on her way.

This request was complied with, and our heroine received much more attention during the day than, as a stranger, and one who appeared so unlikely to be able to make any adequate return, she had a right to expect.

But now poor Phoebe's thoughts were of the most gloomy and disheartening description, for her situation every hour became more critical, and her hopes more distant. Her journey was not near accomplished, and now, when retarded in her progress by sickness, she feared that she would never find money sufficient to carry out her design, and when that was gone, what was to become of her? Could she hope to find friends to sympathise with her and assist her? Alas, no, and nothing therefore could be more wretched and melancholy than the prospect which the future opened to her imagination.

The following morning she was considerably better after the rest she had had, and the care which had been taken of her, still she was far from being in a fit condition for travelling; but she could not afford the money, nor the time to delay, and, in spite of every obstacle, she was compelled to resume her journey, which she did with the greatest difficulty.

We should become tedious were we to record every little incident which occurred to our heroine on that long, toilsome, and melancholy journey, we will therefore proceed to relate the more important events

that took place as she drew near that once peaceful, though humble home which she had unfortunately so long deserted.

A fortnight had nearly elapsed since she had left London, and she had still some twenty miles to travel to reach her native village. She was now in the last stage of misery and destitution, her money was all gone, and for the last day or two she had existed on the niggard charity of strangers, which her wretched condition, and the gnawings of hunger had compelled even her proud spirit to crave.

Nothing could be more deplorable than her personal appearance—but few persons who knew her well, and had been her constant companions in happier days, would hardly have recognised the lovely, merry, light-hearted, and fascinating Phoebe Mayfield, in the haggard, emaciated, careworn being that she then was; and who could have believed that this was the same handsome, fashionable, so called Lady Selborne, who but a few months since had charmed the hearts, and won the unbounded admiration of all who saw her in London? What must have been the anguish, the self-reproach, and bitter remorse of her betrayer, could he have beheld his unfortunate victim then?

From constant exposure to the weather, and the miserable places into which for the last two or three nights, she had been glad to crawl to sleep, her clothes had become torn and dirty, and she had all the appearance of a practised vagrant of the most wretched and degraded order. It was wonderful how she had continued to exist at all, or that she had not again been driven by the horror of despair to lay violent hands on herself.

It was on a dreary stormy day as the afternoon was fast drawing to a close, that faint, weary, and footsore, the ill-fated Phoebe drew near an old barn or out-house which stood a little away from the main road.

It had been deserted by its owner for some time, and it had fallen much into decay, the walls being broken in several places, and a portion of the roof fallen in.

Our heroine felt that it would be impossible for her to proceed farther till she had obtained some rest, and this place, even wretched as it was, might afford her some degree of shelter from the inclemency of the weather; she therefore made the best of her way, or, at any rate, as well as her feeble strength would permit her, towards it, and listening at the open door—for it was now too dark for her to distinguish any object inside—to ascertain whether any unfortunate being like herself had taken possession of it before her; and all being silent, she ventured to enter.

The interior of this place was cheerless and dirty in the extreme. Filth had accumulated on the broken floor, among which at times rats and other vermin revelled, and the wind and the rain were freely admitted through the holes in the wall and roof. These also were the means of affording a grim light which served to show the disgusting features of the place more distinctly, and Phoebe saw in one corner, where the roof was pretty sound, a heap of straw, which had probably been the bed of many a poor destitute creature like herself.

She shuddered as she looked around her, and then securing the door as well as she could, or at any rate, in such a manner as to arouse her should any one venture to intrude, she crawled to the heap of straw, and sinking upon it faint and exhausted, and with an awful sensation as though she was going to die, she clasped her hands in agony together and with difficulty gave utterance to a prayer to the Almighty, imploring His merciful aid in her terrible, and apparently hopeless situation.

The rain was rapidly descending, and the wind blew keenly in at the apertures in the roof and wall. Phoebe crouched down amongst the straw, and, after trying for some time in vain, she did at last sink off into a kind of stupor or sleep.

She had remained for probably about an hour in this state, when she was suddenly aroused by a loud noise outside the door, as if of some person attempting to force it open, and most likely she immediately thought, it was some other poor houseless wanderer seeking a miserable refuge for the night, from the weather, and she shuddered at the idea of meeting with wretchedness and destitution equal to her own.

But her utmost alarm was excited, when she heard the coarse voices of men, who gave utterance to two or three disgusting oaths, and at the same time redoubled their efforts to force the door, which she had rendered temporarily secure by placing some of the fallen rubbish before it.

Phoebe could scarcely repress a cry of terror, but she collected her courage and self-possession as well as she could, and concealed herself partially among the straw, trusting that she might escape observation till she had an opportunity of leaving the place, that part of the barn where she was being buried in utter darkness.

The door soon gave way, and Phoebe looked anxiously towards it, to endeavour to obtain a view of the intruders, which she was enabled to do by the dim light admitted by the opposite opening in the wall, and she trembled with fear at their ruffianly appearance. To her increased terror also, they

again secured the door on the inside in such a manner that it could not be opened without a strong effort, and if these men were the desperate and guilty characters she took them to be, she now gave herself up for lost.

They moved towards the centre of the barn, so that their backs were towards her, and looked around the place. She watched them narrowly, but scarcely ventured to breathe.

"Well," said one of them, "we have managed to elude our pursuers, and this place will doubtless afford us concealment till an early hour in the morning, when we may safely take our departure before any one is about."

"True," coincided his companion, "we have managed this business very well, and I think we may yet escape detection. It is confounded dark here."

"Then let us move into the light yonder, if you are afraid of being in the dark."

"No," said the other, "this will do, besides the wind blows so keenly in at that opening that the further we keep away from it the better. I feel tired, so as there are no chairs or stools here, or anything else for the accommodation of respectable gentlemen, I suppose we must content ourselves by sitting on the floor, and talking over matters."

They seated themselves accordingly, and so that their backs were still turned towards Phoebe, who watched them anxiously.

She remembered that some of the fallen rubbish was piled up in a heap which reached nearly to the opening, and the thought suddenly struck her that if she could pass the fellows cautiously and without being observed by them, she might gain the aperture and by that means effect her escape.

At the idea, she seemed to acquire fresh courage and renewed strength, and rising silently from the straw, and still standing in the shade, she awaited in readiness the moment of action.

"Before we proceed to business, Joe," said the man who had first spoken, "I shall place my bull-dog here," laying his pistol by his side; "then it will be handy, you know, in case of interruption."

"True," agreed his companion, "and mine I put here," also placing his pistol by his side, "and now to business; what about the swag? The old chap bled pretty freely, eh? Here's his purse, it seems pretty well loaded. We'll count the contents, and then to see about dividing the spoil."

The villains did so, their whole attention being occupied; and now was the moment for Phoebe to make a desperate attempt to get possession of the pistols, upon which probably her life depended.

Breathlessly, silently, while the robbers

were engaged in counting over their ill-gotten gold, she stole behind them, and the next instant the deadly weapons were in her grasp and she was gliding like a ghost back to her place of concealment, till she could see a better opportunity to make her final exit by the aperture.

As she did so, however, cautious even as she was, one of the ruffians caught the sound of her footsteps and he hastily turned his head, but Phoebe had immediately drawn herself closer into the shade and thus escaped detection.

"What's the matter now?" demanded the other robber.

"I thought I heard a footstep," was the reply.

"'Twas only your imagination; your growing qualmish."

"Not I. Proceed."

The attention of the villains again became completely absorbed in the division of the spoil, and our heroine mentally commending herself to the protection of heaven again ventured from her place of concealment, and glided noiselessly to that side of the barn where the opening was in the wall.

She had succeeded in climbing up the rubbish, and nearly reached the aperture, when a portion of the brick wall fell with a lumbering noise, the robbers were alarmed, and starting to their feet gazed eagerly towards the spot where Phoebe stood immediately beneath the opening, and in the light they had a distinct view of her.

"Ah—a spy!" they cried, with a fearful oath; "where are the pistols?"

"They are here, villains!" replied Phoebe, boldly, supporting herself by placing her back against the wall, and levelling the pistols menacingly at them, "advance but a step to obstruct me, and, even poor, weak, wretched woman as I am, I will stretch ye dead on the spot!"

The miscreants were completely paralysed, and the next instant Phoebe had passed through the aperture, and, in a manner truly marvellous in her terribly exhausted condition, effected her escape.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TERMINATION OF THE JOURNEY.

For a few seconds the robbers stood astounded and confused, and could scarcely believe the evidence of their senses.

"Confusion!" exclaimed one of them, "to be tricked, outwitted by a woman. She has overheard all, and will doubtless betray us. We must no longer remain here."

"'Tis cursed provoking," said the other, "and then to think she should so cleverly get possession of our pistols. We have nothing now to defend ourselves should we be surprised. But come, let us begone, and try to make the best of a bad bargain. While we stand talking and grumbling here we are running every risk."

To that the other agreed; and having opened the door, and peeped cautiously out to see whether the coast was clear, they hastily quitted the old barn.

They looked eagerly in every direction, but could see nothing of Phoebe, and growling curses upon her head, they entered a dark lane a little to their right, and hurried on their way.

Phoebe on gaining the aperture dropped safely to the ground, the distance only being short, but even that in her weak and wretched state was a most extraordinary feat.

She did not stop to think, for, notwithstanding she had the pistols in her possession, if two such desperate ruffians should rush suddenly and determined upon her, she must fall an easy victim to their ferocious revenge. She therefore gathered all her strength together with a courage almost superhuman, and which perhaps under different circumstances she could not have found, and hastened from the spot, taking the most unfrequented and lonely way, though for what reason it is difficult to conceive, as her object should have been to seek protection from any persons whom she might meet, in the event of the men pursuing and overtaking her.

Fearful of retaining such deadly weapons in her possession, especially in her present distracted state of mind, she threw the pistols, loaded as they were, into a ditch, and then continued her flight until she was compelled to pause, overcome by the fatigue she had undergone, and the excitement of her feelings, and she then found herself in a lonely road, and imagined that she had got some distance from the scene of her late adventure.

The storm had ceased, but the night was dark and dreary, and remarkably cold for the time of year, the wind howling in hollow gusts, and penetrating with piercing keenness through the thin and ragged clothing, which now barely covered the poor girl's wasted and emaciated form.

She shivered with the cold, and now the full wretchedness of her situation became the more awfully apparent to her, and she shrank from the dismal and hopeless prospect before her with instinctive feelings of horror and dismay.

Famishing, destitute, without a place of shelter, and ignorant where to find one, or where to rest her weary limbs, what could

possibly be more fearful than her fate? And what would be the result of all her exertions, her struggles, her cares and anxieties, even if she should reach the termination of her journey, to accomplish which she had yet to travel several miles? Who would receive her with kindness and compassion, or render her the least assistance? All, she feared, were too much prejudiced against her, to feel any pity for her misfortunes, and therefore she had nothing to hope for from them.

She now almost regretted that her former attempt at suicide had failed; had it not done so, her sorrows would have been long since at an end. Better, much better, she now thought, would it have been for her to have remained in London, and endeavoured to obtain some honest employment, (which by the assistance of her excellent friends, Mr. and Mrs. Osborne, she probably might soon have done), than expose herself to the misery, fatigue, anxiety of mind, and the privation she had done.

She was so completely worn out, that she felt as if she could lie down upon the spot on which she stood and die. But still with that desperate clinging to life which is inherent in all mankind, even under the most awful and hopeless circumstances, she struggled against fatigue and illness, and again with difficulty dragged her trembling and weary limbs forwards, being obliged to pause every two or three minutes to rest herself, with the faint hope of reaching some human habitation in which she might be able to obtain a few hour's rest and shelter.

In this wretched manner she had continued slowly to struggle on for more than half-an-hour, without meeting with anything to realise her hopes, when casting her eyes along the road, and through the almost impenetrable darkness of the night, she beheld a glimmering light at some distance, and which probably proceeded from the window of some house or cottage.

"Oh, Heaven, give me strength to reach this place," she fervently ejaculated, in a faint voice. "and that I may meet with those who will not turn a deaf ear to my supplication, but take compassion on my insupportable miseries, and render me that assistance of which I stand so dreadfully in need."

This thought seemed for the moment to recruit her strength, and she proceeded more quickly in the direction of the light; but she had not gone far when it disappeared, and she was again left in doubt and uncertainty.

She paused, disappointed, and undecided what to do; yet still believing that she must be near some human dwelling, she again resumed her way, as nearly in the direction from whence she had seen the light as she

could recollect; and presently it appeared again much nearer than before, and she caught the indistinct outline of some building which convinced her that her surmises were correct.

By the most extraordinary exertion she quickened her pace, and immediately afterwards she found herself standing before a small but strongly built house, of ancient appearance, and from one of the upper windows of which, the light which she had seen, and guided her footsteps there, glimmered.

Phoebe looked anxiously at the gloomy and lonely building, and her courage almost forsook her. But there was no time for hesitation or delay. Her feeble and trembling limbs could support her no further—a sickly, death-like faintness came over her—her brain turned giddy—and she had only time to reach the door, and knock loudly, when she sunk on the damp earth insensible.

On recovering, she found herself seated in an arm chair before a cheerful fire, in an old-fashioned room, with ugly, cumbrous-looking furniture, and an elderly man and woman, of no very prepossessing appearance attending upon her, who put many questions to her, as to who she was, and what had brought her into the wretched situation in which they had found her.

"Alas," replied our heroine, "I am a poor friendless being, houseless, destitute, starving. Oh, in mercy grant me some relief, and a night's shelter from the inclemency of the weather, or I must surely perish."

"Why, you see," observed the man, in a hesitating tone of voice, "we are but very poor people ourselves, and have therefore nothing to give away in charity."

Phoebe's heart sunk within her on hearing these words, and she looked imploringly at the old man and woman without being able to utter a word.

"But," added the old man, after a brief pause, "as you seem ill and exhausted, we have no objection to grant you a lodging for the night, and such refreshment as you may require; but remember that to-morrow you must endeavour to proceed on your way."

Our heroine warmly returned her thanks, even for this trifling hospitality so grudgingly offered, and having partaken of some coarse food supplied to her with rather a niggard hand by the old woman, was at her urgent request, conducted to a chamber, where, on being left alone, she threw herself without having the strength to undress, on the bed, and soon became lost to consciousness of her miseries in sleep.

The next day she felt as ill and wretched as could be, notwithstanding which the old



man and his wife did not seem at all inclined to extend their hospitality, and after having partaken of a hasty meal, the old woman gave her a few coppers, with the apparent self-satisfaction that she had performed a most benevolent action, Phoebe was compelled to take her departure from the house.

We will pass over what befell her that day and the next—her sufferings being similar to those she had previously endured, with the exception that a favourable change had taken place in the weather, which was now remarkably fine—and bring her at length within sight of her native village.

By almost unexampled perseverance and exertion she had accomplished her arduous and melancholy task, and Phoebe Mayfield stood once more amidst those well known scenes in which she had passed so many

years of happiness, and which for the wily tempter who had wrought her destruction, she would never have abandoned.

And oh, what a tempest of agonising thoughts and feelings agitated her breast, as she timidly and fearfully cast her eyes on all around her, and longed yet dreaded to proceed. Dared she, wretched, fallen, outcast creature as she was, venture again to appear amongst those scenes, and the friends and companions of her childhood, who had probably now learned to think of her with scorn, disgust, and abhorrence, and who would view her present misery as a just retribution for the sins she had committed, and refuse her commiseration and relief? She shuddered and shrunk from the idea, with a feeling of the most poignant anguish which can be imagined.

And then, much more agonising thought, could she venture to meet that aged parent, over whose declining years she had cast the gloom of ceaseless, inconsolable grief and despair? Dare she meet his wrathful eye, and listen to his withering reproaches? The thought racked her brain to madness, and now at the very moment when she had arrived at the completion of that task she had struggled so hard to accomplish, her fortitude all but forsook her, and she stood trembling on the spot, hesitating, doubtful, and undecided.

"Almighty God!" she exclaimed, raising her eyes towards heaven, "forsake me not, I beseech You, in this moment of severest trial, but give me fortitude to support the further sufferings it may be my fate to have to undergo. Oh, mercy, mercy for the unfortunate penitent."

She seemed to be imbued with fresh strength, and courage, and hope, as she gave utterance to these words, and with slow, yet steady steps she moved towards that spot near the entrance to the village, where the humble home of her childhood was situated; and with what varied emotions did the heart of the poor wanderer throb as she proceeded, but she mustered all the resolution she could, and at length, after an absence of three years Phoebe Mayfield stood before the once happy cot in which she was born.

And oh, what language, however eloquent, could properly describe the feelings, the intense feelings of anguish, sorrow, and remorse, which now agitated the poor wanderer's breast? Bright visions of the happy past, mingled with those of gloom and horror, of treachery and suffering, of fond hopes cherished but to be annihilated; all these rushed with tempestuous force upon her imagination, and the effect was overwhelming.

'Tis true she looked towards the cottage, but she saw it not distinctly, for a mist seemed to gather before her eyes, and her brain was bewildered. She felt as though she was ready to faint, and had she not supported herself against the old tree which spread its luxuriantly foliaged branches near the home of her childhood, she must have fallen to the earth.

She recalled to her memory that fatal evening when she had abandoned that peaceful home, and those aged and affectionate parents who were then, though the most humble of the humble were their circumstances, the happiest of human beings. She, in imagination, once more heard their merry laugh as it rang from the cottage; again she thought she saw them, as she beheld them dressed in all their holliday finery to go to the festivities in the Hazel Dell, little dreaming of the terrible storm which was about to burst o'er their devoted heads; she remem-

bered her own struggles between love and duty, her wavering, her irresolution on the occasion, and the reflection was almost too much for her reason to withstand.

Alas, where were those venerable, those revered parents now? The answer to this question, smote her breast with horror and compunction. The poor old woman slept beneath the green grass turf in the old churchyard, and her father—Ah, where was he?

That thought fell like an electric shock upon her brain, and, hastily passing her hands before her eyes, as if awaking from some fearful dream, she now for the first time had a clear and distinct view of the cottage, and the melancholy and extraordinary change which had taken place in its appearance, struck a deadly chill upon her heart, and filled her breast with the most dismal and terrible forebodings.

She gazed still more steadfastly, and could scarcely believe the evidence of her eyes, but could almost persuade herself that she was labouring under some delusion of the senses. Lonely and deserted was that once cheerful dwelling. Doors, window-shutters were closed and secured. The honeysuckle which had climbed the casements, and the humble porch, trailed along the ground, and had been trodden under foot; the little garden which herself and her mother had ever attended to with such care, was wild, destroyed, and overgrown with rank weeds, and the flower-pots that had ever contained the choicest flowers, now lay broken on the earth.

With trembling steps, and a heart ready to burst with emotion, poor Phoebe approached nearer to the cottage, and listened, as though she almost expected to hear the voices of her parents within, bemoaning her cruel desertion, and bitterly reproaching her for her base ingratitude.

The silence of death reigned within the place, and added to her despair.

And now the worst fears rushed with overwhelming force upon her mind. Her father was dead; the desertion of the cottage, and the melancholy aspect of all around, proved it, and the measure of her woes was full. She clasped her hands in agony together, and a groan of the deepest horror escaped her throbbing bosom.

"Wretch—guilty wretch that I am," she exclaimed, "I am the fell destroyer of both my parents, and the curse, the just though terrible retribution of heaven pursues me for it. Oh, let me die upon this hallowed spot, now rendered desolate by my guilt."

She sunk, overpowered, on her knees, and for some minutes remained in a kind of stupor.

Then as a wild thought suddenly flashed upon her brain, she arose, and tried to open the door, with the idea of entering the cottage, but it resisted all her efforts to force it, and, exhausted, she once more staggered to the old tree, and supported herself against its trunk.

For what then had all the sufferings and miseries of her long journey from London been encountered? Where were the melancholy hopes she had indulged in, and which had alone sustained her throughout trials and vicissitudes that she must otherwise have sunk under? Better had it surely have been had she perished at the time when she made the rash and desperate attempt at self-destruction; for she was now indeed a wretched, friendless being in the world, apparently abandoned by heaven and mankind, with no other prospect before her but insupportable misery and despair.

After some time passed in these dismal reflections, with a sad heart, and scarcely knowing what she did, she turned slowly away from the spot, and wandered on, she knew not whither, but, anxious though she was to have her terrible doubts, fears, and surmises either removed or confirmed—for suspense was even worse than certainty—she dreaded to enter the village, and to encounter those that knew her, and who would now too probably look upon her with disgust and abhorrence, and consider the terrible sufferings she was enduring no more than a just punishment for that of which she had been guilty.

It was shortly after this that she encountered Farmer Hodge, and the peasants, and the scene which then took place, and which so greatly added to the misery and horrors of her situation, has been already described.

For a time we must now again leave the unfortunate girl to her misery and anguish.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A MYSTERY.—MR. BRISTLES AND HIS DISCOVERY.

After the cowardly attack of Beaufort and his vagabond associate on Amy Ashford, and their discomfiture at the hands of Henry, Bob Bristles, and the villagers, they contrived to make their escape, but not until they had both received some rough, but well merited treatment, and having got to some distance from the scene of the affray, they paused for breath, and also to endeavour to collect themselves after their signal defeat.

They both showed evident marks of violence; the villain Beaufort was bleeding

freely from the blows he had received from Henry Ashford, and Sam Filcher had received a blow on the head which narrowly escaped being mortal. However, the ruffian had been used to severe punishment in the course of his brutal and disgusting career, and he therefore bore it with becoming fortitude and resignation.

"Curse that beadle," said Filcher, "he has knocked me silly. But," he suddenly added, with a loud laugh, "I say guvner, what a pretty object they've made you. Blessed if they ain't damaged your personal appearance greatly, though it vosn't any of the most genteel or respectable before."

"What do you mean?" demanded Beaufort, impatiently.

"Vhy," replied Filcher, "they've converted that elegant coat of your's into a spencer, for they've docked the tails of it."

Beaufort started, and discovering that Sam had spoken the truth, he evinced the greatest excitement.

"I'm ruined, Filcher, completely ruined," he exclaimed.

"Vell," returned Sam, "I know you're ruined; we've both been ruined long ago. But I say, guvner, there wasn't nothing valuable in either of the coat pockets, was there?"

"Valuable," answered Beaufort, "one of them contained a secret which must either have made my fortune, or cost Lord Selborne his life."

"Made your fortin, and made my fortin," cried Sam Filcher, with mock despair, "oh, don't, you overwhelms me. Oh, Sam Filcher, Sam Filcher, all your brilliant prospects is blighted for ever."

At that moment the voices of men saluted their ears, and they seeing their pursuers approaching the spot, made a precipitate retreat, and disappeared just at the moment that Henry Ashford and his sister, together with Bob Bristles and several of the villagers, arrived at the spot.

"I could have sworn that I caught a glimpse of the scoundrels about here," observed the beadle, "but they are not here."

"It is a pity that the villains should escape," said Henry, "for they have a long list of crimes to answer for, and for which it is time that they were called to account. Who would have thought of encountering them again, after the lapse of so long a period? But what is that you hold in your hand, Mr. Bristles?"

"This," said the beadle, holding it up with a proud air of triumph, "this is a trophy of valour, which ought to gain me a golden medal at the least. These are the tails of that rascally captain's ragged coat, which he left in my hands on taking to his heels. There's a pocket in one of them, and

something in it. Eh, what's this? a parcel of papers, tied together with red tape; this looks official. I must examine the contents."

"Give me that parcel," said Henry, eagerly, and endeavouring to snatch it from the beadle's hand.

"Stop, stop, Master Harry," replied Mr. Bristles, rather indignantly, "with all due *indifference* to you, you are rather too fast. You do not pay becoming respect to the highest official dignitary in the parish. These official documents must not leave my official hands till I have examined the contents. Eh, what do I see?" he added, as he commenced reading the papers that had so strangely come into his possession; "wonderful—remarkable—astounding!"

"Give me those papers, I beg of you," again anxiously requested Henry. "I am convinced by your manner that they are of importance."

"Importance," repeated the beadle, carefully tying up the papers again, and depositing them in his pocket, "I believe they are too; I have discovered something here which beats Magna Charta hollow."

"What do you mean to do?" interrogated Henry Ashford.

"Do," replied Bristles; "why hang those two precious scoundrels, Beaufort and Filcher, as soon as ever they fall into my clutches, as the high official representative of the majesty of the law is bound to do. Come along, my lads, I've made my fortune, and I'll make your's if you only stand by your worthy beadle."

Thus saying, the sagacious Bob Bristles, hurried away from the spot, followed by the villagers, and leaving Henry and his sister in a state of the greatest perplexity.

"I'm lost in amazement and anxiety, Amy," observed her brother; "those documents found in the coat-pocket of the villain Beaufort, excite strange thoughts and suspicions in my mind, and I cannot rest until I have become acquainted with their contents."

"What are your conjectures on the subject, Henry?" interrogated Amy.

"That the papers contain something important relating to the unfortunate Phoebe Mayfield and Lord Selborne," answered Henry. "Oh, Phoebe, hapless being, to whom, in spite of all, my heart still so fondly clings, where are you now? or are you still in existence?"

"Oh, heaven grant that she may be, and that she again ere long may be restored to her aged father's arms," said the affectionate Amy.

"Oh, no," returned her brother, with a sigh of regret, "it is impossible that can ever be. Think you that the poor broken-hearted old man will ever again receive to

his arms, one who has brought him to shame and misery? No, in his solitude he gloomily broods over his sorrows, and curses in his heart one whom he can only now look upon with scorn and loathing, as a creature of infamy."

"Poor Phoebe," ejaculated Amy, passionately; "but come, my dear brother, you must endeavour to dispel these gloomy thoughts, and to hope for the best. Our friends await us, so let us hasten to join them in their festivities."

"I cannot, I will not refuse you, Amy," replied her brother; "wrecked in all my fondest hopes and wishes, I have still one gentle being who through every trouble hath clung to me, one fond and faithful heart to love me—'tis your's, my own dear sister."

He kissed her affectionately as he uttered these words, and they then slowly retired from the spot.

Mr. Bristles, however, could on no account whatever—not even by the arguments of his friend and benefactor, Squire Stubbles, to whose wishes he was usually accustomed to yield—be persuaded to part with the papers he had found in the coat-pocket of Beaufort, or to divulge the nature of their contents, and they therefore remained a profound mystery, and caused Henry Ashford and his sister especially many anxious hours of fruitless conjecture, which the longer they indulged in it, involved them still deeper in perplexity.

What use the self-important beadle intended to put them to, will be seen hereafter.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LORD SELBORNE.—THE EXCITING MEETING BETWEEN HIM AND OLD MARK MAYFIELD.

But what had become of the penitent seducer of Phoebe Mayfield during this long interval? We will proceed to relate.

Terrible had been his anguish and remorse, the more so as all his efforts to discover his hapless victim, notwithstanding they had been most indefatigable and unremitting, were unavailing, and he almost abandoned himself to complete despair, entertaining the most torturing fears of the fate which had befallen her, and of which he must ever accuse himself of being the cause.

Incog, he had journeyed to the neighbourhood of her native village, and prosecuted his inquiries there amongst those whom he thought were the likeliest to afford him the desired information, but with the same unsuccessful result; and the terms of reprobation in which all whom he met with, spoke

of her conduct and his own, added to his poignant and overwhelming anguish and remorse.

He heard all the particulars of the present melancholy situation of poor old Mark Mayfield, but he dreaded to meet him; and after some weeks passed in travelling over Yorkshire, tired of England, and abandoning all society, with a feeling of repugnance, he departed for the continent, with the hope that change of scene might serve to divert his mind from the sorrows that so heavily oppressed it.

But vain were all his endeavours to obtain tranquility; his misery became hourly the more insupportable, his sufferings the more acute, and, after travelling in different parts of the continent for some months with no effect, disgusted with all he saw, and truly wretched, he once more returned to England, and before he was hardly aware of it again found himself in that part of Yorkshire where he had first encountered that fair being whom he had now too much reason to fear he should never behold again.

The shades of evening were fast gathering around, and a storm seemed threatening, as Lord Selborne on foot, and unattended, he having left his domestic at the hotel where he had put up, entered a romantic woodland glade some short distance from the village of Dewsbury.

His spirits were more than usually depressed on this occasion, and it was in vain that he endeavoured to arouse himself. He paused, and reflected gloomily, and the stillness and retirement of the spot was quite in unison with his feelings.

"Oh, when will this life of terrible anxiety and agony have an end?" he soliloquised in a voice of the deepest melancholy; "every day, every hour does but add to my misery and despair. Vain, vain have all my endeavours to discover my unfortunate victim been, fruitless all my hopes of being enabled to render her all the atonement in my power, for the cruel, the irreparable wrongs that I have done her. And now after a melancholy absence of many months, I again find myself near that once happy village home which by my guilty persuasions, in an evil hour she so unfortunately abandoned. These scenes are painfully familiar to me. Yonder lane, if I mistake not, leads to the lonely dwelling in which poor old Mark Mayfield has taken up his residence, dare I venture to visit the unfortunate man, and to encounter his bitter reproaches? No, no, I dare not; my courage fails me, and my heart sinks with cowardly terror at the thought."

Again he paused, and hesitated what to do.

"And yet," he said, "what strange and irresistible feeling is this which steals over

me, and seems to urge me on to that which at the same time I dread to encounter? Yes, in spite of whatever the result may be, I will again seek the wretched father of Phoebe, and implore his forgiveness."

Having come to this resolution, he walked towards the entrance to the lane he had mentioned, but had no sooner done so, than a mournful cry, as if proceeding from some person in distress, and at no great distance, saluted his ears, and he strained his eyes in the direction from whence it proceeded.

"Ah," he ejaculated, "in the dim twilight I behold a human form approaching slowly along the lane. And now I see it more distinctly. It is the figure of a man, whose steps are feeble, and whose form seems bent with age or sorrow. What terrible presentiment is this which crosses my mind? I will stand aside and observe him."

He drew himself back into the shadow of the forest as he spoke, and awaited the approach of the stranger with painful curiosity and anxiety.

Slowly at length he reached the spot, and Lord Selborne trembled with an irresistible feeling of horror and remorse on recognising in the wretched, squalid, gray-haired tottering being before him, the unfortunate old Mark Mayfield.

Oh, how the heart of the penitent nobleman sickened at the terrible change which sorrow had wrought in that once robust form and healthy, cheerful-looking countenance. He could scarcely believe his eyes, and compassion, deep as it was sincere, mingled with the feelings of compunction that wrung his bosom, and distracted his brain.

As usual, although the evening was particularly mild, Mark appeared to be shivering with cold, and after a brief pause, during which he seemed to be completely lost within himself, and to take no notice of the objects around him, in his now accustomed low and dismal tone of voice, he said—

"Cauld, cauld, it be vera cauld. We ha' nae summer now; it be all winter, and ev'ry-thing do seem to be frozen, dead, and withered. But we had blithesome summer once, and the fields and meadows did look so green—and the pretty flowers did look so fair and gay—and the bright yellow corn did wave in the golden sunlight, and all things smiled and were lovely. I had a good old dame then, and a pretty innocent child—no, no! Oh, that that once loved name should pollute the lips that gave it utterance, and fill this aged breast wi' shame and indignation. I have nae child now—nae child now; I be all alone, all alone in the world."

Heart-rending sobs choked the old man's further utterance, and he was moving slowly and thoughtfully from the spot, when Lord

Selborne came forward, unable any longer to control his emotions, and in a voice of the greatest sympathy ejaculated—

"Poor old man—much injured Mark!"

The back of Mark was turned towards him, when he came forward, but he started as the words fell indistinctly on his ears, and cried—

"Ah, what sound was that, which came like some hissing serpent to mine ears, and filling my breast wi' horror?"

"Oh, Mark, much wronged man," repeated Selborne, in louder tones than before.

The old man started at the sound as though he had been struck by a thunderbolt, and as his eyes glared wildly upon his lordship's now well-recognised features, in a voice rendered hoarse and terrible by the intensity of his excited feelings, he exclaimed—

"Ah! it be the fiend come again to mock me, and to triumph in my sufferings! Away! monster! villain, hence; and no longer madden and disgrace me by thine hated presence!"

"Mark, Mark," cried the agitated Lord Selborne, "for the love of Heaven hear me."

"Begone, seducer, murderer, begone!" exclaimed the wretched man, in still more fearful accents, and with withering looks; "begone, lest the words that escape the broken hearted feyther's lips, should fall like lightning on thine ears, and blast thee. Canst thou give me back my poor old dame?—canst thou restore to me mine innocent child? No—no—no—thou canst not—thou canst not!"

Convulsive agony shook the limbs of the unhappy man, as he gave vent to this burst of hysterical emotion, and he sobbed and wept like a child. Lord Selborne was distracted, and for a moment or two he was unable to utter a reply, but at length he said—

"Much wronged old man, too well do I know how bitterly I deserve your reproaches. Alas, I have indeed been most guilty, but, if sincere penitence can in any way atone for the past, oh, most fervent, believe me, is the remorse I now feel, and here, on my knees, do I implore your forgiveness."

"Oh, ees, ess," returned Mark, with a sarcastic laugh, and at the same time fumbling nervously in his pocket; "I should indeed be merciful. It be fit that I should pardon thee, too; and I will—I will—thus—"

He rushed frantically on Selborne with a clasp knife as he uttered these words, and attempted to stab him; but his lordship had watched his actions narrowly, and perceiving at once his desperate intention, he arrested his arm and prevented the guilty deed.

"Old man," he said, in a solemn voice of

admonition, "would you disgrace your gray hairs by the crime of murder?"

The knife fell from the old man's hand immediately, and in a voice of the most indescribable horror he exclaimed—

"What wur I about to do?—load my conscience wi' the dreadful crime of murder! Let me begone—do not dare to detain me—madness be upon my brain—my blood be froze to ice—away—away—away!"

Wildly, frantically the wretched man rushed from the spot, and left Lord Selborne in a state of mind which no language can be sufficiently powerful adequately to describe.

For a few minutes he was transfixed to the spot, and unable to utter a word; but at length he said—

"Oh, what ruin and misery have I been the guilty cause of. Unhappy old man, how little did you deserve so cruel a fate as this. I dare not follow him. Oh, let me away, and endeavour to hide my guilt and shame from mortal eye."

Not daring even to cast his eyes in the direction which Mark Mayfield had taken, Lord Selborne, as quick as his trembling limbs would allow him, departed from the spot.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PHOEBE AT HER MOTHER'S GRAVE.—THE MEETING OF FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

With the wild speed and air of a maniac, poor old Mark Mayfield, after his interview with the repentant Lord Selborne, hurried along through the depths of the forest, totally regardless whither he went, so that he could shut out the maddening thoughts, and recollections of the past, that rushed tumultuously on his brain.

Hideous forms seemed to pursue him, and to cross his path, mocking his sufferings and yelling in his ears, inciting him to deeds of darkness and of horror.

At length he suddenly emerged from the forest, and then turned into a pathway which led to the old Stone-house.

Breathless though he was, and panting with emotion and excitement, he never paused for an instant, seeming to be flying from some imaginary danger, and which required all his exertions to avoid. He paused not, we say, till he found himself in his gloomy sitting-room in the lonely building where he had now taken up his residence.

Here, sinking in his old arm chair, he stared vacantly around the room, as if uncertain as to where he was. Large drops of perspiration stood upon his quivering temples,

he clenched his hands convulsively together and trembled in every limb.

It was some time ere his excitement had sufficiently abated to allow him to collect his thoughts, and to reflect calmly upon what had taken place.

But when he did so, his emotions were overwhelming, and he wept and sobbed like an infant.

The sight of Selborne, had opened afresh the wounds of his deeply lacerated and afflicted heart, brought the remembrance of his once innocent child more vividly to his mind; recalled to his memory the last sad moments of his unfortunate wife to his memory, and drove him almost to frenzy.

"The bold-faced villain," at length he exclaimed, in a hoarse and agitated voice, "to dare again to disgust me by his hated presence. He the destroyer o' all the fond feyther's hopes, the seducer o' all that wur lovely an' innocent! He be come to triumph in the desolating work o' his accused hands, and to deride my sufferings. And I ha' suffered him to escape my vengeance. Fool, coward, that I am, why did I hesitate? Why did I spare the base betrayer of my daughter? the murderer o' my good old dame! Heaven surely must have pardoned the wretched parent for the just retribution wreaked upon the miscreant's head! Oh, Phoebe, lost, abandoned girl, poor o'd dame. I—I shall go mad!"

He beat his breast in the terrible agony of his despair, then covering his face with his hands, his head sunk upon the table by which he sat, and he fell into a drowsy state of unconsciousness, in which he remained for more than an hour, deep sobs and groans ever and anon escaping his bosom.

Suddenly, however, he started to his feet, trembling convulsively in every limb, and his eyes glaring eagerly around the room, as though he expected to encounter some ghastly object. While in the state of stupefaction we have described, he beheld, or fancied he beheld the spectre of his poor old dame, who looked sorrowfully upon him, and pointed towards heaven, as if commanding him to fix his hopes and his reliance there. He imagined that he arose from his seat with extended arms, but he could not approach her.

Then he fancied that her lips moved, and that in sepulchral tones, but at the same time those of heavenly sweetness and impressiveness, he heard her say:

"No longer droop in useless sorrow and regret. Arraign not the wisdom or the will of heaven. Open thine heart to mercy, and hasten to the cottage thou hast so long deserted. Away, and see what there awaits thee."

As the last words died away upon his ears, a strain of heavenly melody seemed to float upon the air, and the vision gradually faded from his sight.

For a minute or two the old man stood in the attitude we have described, then, as the words of the spectre again seemed to sound in his ears, he rushed from the house, and with frantic speed made his way towards the cottage which had once been the happy home of his humble family.

The last rays of the setting sun had just departed, and evening was closing around, wrapping everything in silence and gloom, when the wretched Phoebe (who after her painful meeting with Farmer Hodge and the rustics, had lingered for hours in the neighbourhood, distracted, and undecided how to act) with slow and solemn footsteps entered the old village church-yard in which rested the remains of her mother. What mingled emotions racked the poor girl's bosom as she trod within those sacred precincts. Remorse, sorrow, self-reproach, and despair, alike tortured her, and made her shudder to advance; yet an irresistible impulse urged her on, in spite of her fears, and still slowly but steadfastly she proceeded along the narrow pathway which led to the old church porch.

She felt a sensation of the most unconquerable awe stealing over her as she gazed upon the different tombstones, which looked grim and ghastly in the dim light; and she could almost imagine that she beheld awful shadowy forms hovering near them, and seeming to obstruct her way.

She gazed towards the ancient church, it was wrapped in gloom, and which was increased by the drooping branches of the old yew tree, which grew before it, and cast its dark shadows far around.

Phoebe paused, and her heart palpitated violently. Beneath the wide spreading branches of that old tree she felt convinced rested the cold remains of her revered and unfortunate mother, and—the thought was torturing—probably too, those of her father, who, it was but reasonable to fear, had sunk beneath the heavy weight of affliction it had been his hard lot to endure.

Dare she venture to approach that hallowed spot? Might she not expect that the ghastly shade of her poor old mother would rise before her eyes, clothed in all the awful ceremonies of the grave, and curse her?

But she could not have to endure greater horror and anguish than that she now experienced, and mentally imploring the mercy of Heaven, she again proceeded along the path, and at last stood before that humble mound of earth, beneath which the ashes of poor old Dame Mayfield reposed. The green grass, intermingled with wild flowers, planted

there by the hand of Mark, grew thickly upon it, and the night wind sighed mournfully above it, as if in sorrow for the departed.

Phoebe sunk convulsively on her knees, and for a few moments her emotions were so great and overpowering, that they quite bewildered her senses, and she was unable to give utterance to a word.

Tears at length came to her relief, and she gave way to a wild paroxysm of grief, which no effort could calm, and no language could properly describe.

Fervently then did the poor wanderer offer up her prayers to heaven, and invoke the forgiveness of her mother's spirit.

Suddenly, while she was thus occupied, —could her ears deceive her?—plaintive and solemn sounds of sacred music floated around, and seemed to proceed from the church. These sounds were mingled with soft and heavenly voices, to which Phoebe listened with breathless attention, awe and astonishment, and could almost imagine she heard them mention her name, in tones of pity and consolation.

With eager eyes she gazed towards the sacred building, which at first was shrouded in profound darkness; but as she still looked in fearful expectation, it became illuminated, as if by magic, with a supernatural light, and again the sacred harmony swelled to a pitch of solemn grandeur and sublimity, and once more Phoebe imagined that her name was repeated in tones of compassion and of consolation.

The effect was too much for the poor broken hearted girl; her bosom swelled to bursting, a sickening sensation of awe and terror overcame her, and she sunk prostrate on the grave of her mother, insensible.

After an interval of some minutes, the keen night air restored her to consciousness, and she looked anxiously and fearfully around her. The old church was again buried in silence and darkness, and it seemed as though what she had seen and heard must have been a dream.

Slowly she arose from the grave, and, almost unconscious of what she did, moved away from the spot, and retraced her steps from the churchyard.

She knew not whither to direct her steps; where to seek a shelter for the night, or what course in future to pursue.

"Oh, why," she mournfully ejaculated, as she proceeded on her dreary way; "why did this stubborn heart not break, and suffer me to die upon my poor mother's hallowed grave? For what fresh miseries am I still reserved? Why should a poor, friendless, outcast being as myself, still be permitted to exist, to endure the scorn, and the taunts

and reproaches of my unfeeling fellow creatures? Great God of mercy, I humbly but fervently implore You to look down upon me, and to guide me how to act in this, my most fearful hour of tribulation."

The rain now began to descend rapidly, and everything betokened that it would be a tempestuous night; and thus was the misery of Phoebe's situation heightened on every side, and it seemed impossible that she could survive that night, exposed to all the inclemency of the weather.

Still she wandered on, as well as her feeble limbs would let her, and, at length, before she was scarcely conscious of the way she was pursuing, she found herself again approaching the spot on which the home of her childhood stood, and in a few minutes she once more gazed upon its humble walls.

A sudden thought flashed upon her. Could she but gain admission to that long abandoned dwelling, even if it were to perish in its sacred precincts, she thought that, even in the midst of all the horrors by which she was surrounded, she could be comparatively happy.

With a throbbing heart, and eager expectation she approached the door, which she tried to open; but useless were all the feeble efforts which her exhausted strength allowed her to make, and the same was the case with the window, which she also tried.

She was about to abandon the attempt in despair, when she suddenly remembered the back door, the fastenings of which had never been so strong as those of the other, and aroused to fresh hope, she walked round to the back of the house, and then to her gratification, beheld that the door had fallen partially from its hinges, and was standing open.

And now a powerful sensation of mingled awe and dread agitated the bosom of Phoebe, and she faltered on the threshold, almost afraid to enter that deserted dwelling, which but for her might still have been the cheerful abode of affectionate parents, with every happiness reigning around.

That thought was overwhelming and she hesitated in her purpose.

A superstitious feeling of dread stole over her, and added to the varied and conflicting emotions that already agitated her bosom.

After a brief pause she ventured to advance into the little passage upon which the door opened, looking at the same time timidly towards the back parlour door, which was standing partially open, but she started back almost immediately, and trembled in every limb, for she was almost positive she heard a deep, hollow sigh, proceed from the room, and that she caught a glimpse of a dim shadowy form, seated in the high-backed



chair, which was usually occupied by her mother, when she was in that apartment.

For some time so powerful was this impression on her mind, that she could not dismiss it, but at length ashamed of such weakness and superstition, she aroused herself, and mustering up all her firmness and resolution, while she mentally invoked the protection of heaven, she advanced into the cottage, and entered the room before mentioned, into which a faint light from a small window was only admitted.

And what were the emotions of the poor girl, as she stood once more in that humble apartment, the one in which, as she had always been given to understand, she was born? Need we attempt to describe them?

For a few minutes her brain was giddy and bewildered; and, although she gazed

eagerly through the dim obscurity of the place, she could not distinguish any particular object, and her eyes seemed, as it were, to gaze upon vacancy.

Gradually, however, she collected herself, and she saw everything more distinctly.

The old lumbering furniture seemed not to have been in the least disturbed since the time that the cottage was inhabited, but it was covered with dust and cobwebs, and in many instances was broken and falling to decay.

There was the poor old dame's chair, standing as it was wont to do in the chimney corner, and the little work-table close by, where she used to occupy herself for hours. And there was Phoebe's sampler, too, still hanging over the mantle-piece, which had been so highly treasured by her parents,

as a marvellous specimen of precocious talent.

Tears started to her eyes as she gazed upon these melancholy relics, and gave vent to the feelings and recollections to which they naturally gave rise. The solemn, death-like silence too which reigned throughout the deserted cottage, increased the depression of her spirits, and, scarcely knowing what she did, she threw herself in her mother's chair, and covering her face with her hands, for some time she became completely lost to everything around her in deep and agonising thought.

At length, however, she again aroused herself, and, impelled by a melancholy feeling of curiosity which she could not resist, she ventured to enter the adjoining room, where for so long a period she had not before been. How awful was the change; she shuddered, conscience seemed to reproach her more bitterly than ever, and her heart sunk within her.

Many of the principle articles of furniture which this room had contained was removed, the rest was thrown into disorder, and was thickly encrusted with dust; and the whole place indeed had a most chilling and dismal appearance.

The old clock was in its original place, but it had long since ceased to go, and its well known tick was heard no more.

Convulsive sobs swelled the bosom of our heroine as she gazed upon this desolate scene, and thought of the happy past, and the melancholy circumstances that had occurred since then.

She knelt down in the intensity of her emotions, and whilst the tears streamed from her eyes, prayed to heaven for mercy and forgiveness.

While she was thus occupied, a sudden noise outside the cottage door startled and alarmed her, and she hastily arose to her feet, and looked towards the door with trembling anxiety and expectation.

The noise seemed to proceed from some one endeavouring to force an entrance, and listening breathlessly, Phoebe heard distinctly the voice of a man, giving vent to some mournful words of complaint, at the same time that he renewed his efforts to open the door, but with no better effect than had attended the previous endeavours of Phoebe.

"It is some unfortunate, houseless being like myself," she thought, "who seeks a shelter from the storm. Why should I fear?"

Still she hesitated what to do, and trembled; she remembered her dangerous adventure with the two robbers in the barn, and she could not, in spite of her efforts, help feeling a sensation of fear.

There were a few more ineffectual attempts

to force the door, and then all became quiet, and Phoebe concluded that the individual, whoever he was, had abandoned his object in despair, and quitted the spot.

She, however, felt a considerable anxiety to ascertain who the stranger was, and her heart throbbed with a powerful emotion, for which she was at a loss properly to account.

She returned to the back parlour, but started back somewhat alarmed when she beheld the figure of a man just slowly entering the room by the open door which had given her admission, and she stood tremblingly and cautiously in the shade to watch and listen.

There was not sufficient light to enable her to distinguish the person of the intruder clearly, but Phoebe could observe that it was apparently the form of an old man, meanly clad, and worn out either with bodily fatigue or mental affliction. Her heart palpitated more violently than ever, and her agitation altogether increased. She drew in her breath, and awaited in doubt and expectation.

The man advanced a few paces, with feeble steps, into the room, and then stopped suddenly, clasped his hands vehemently together, as if in devotion, and appeared to glance eagerly at all around, and once more Phoebe heard his convulsive sobs, and a strange feeling came over her, which every moment increased in strength.

The stranger, however, remained in the same fixed attitude, as though he was incapable of any further movement, and presently he spoke, and our heroine listened with the most breathless attention and curiosity to catch the words he uttered.

"All be still," he murmured, in low and melancholy accents, "all be still an' dreary now within this o'd cottage as the cold and peaceful grave where rest the remains o' my poor wife."

A wild shriek of agony escaped the lips of the unfortunate Phoebe as the words and the voice in which they were spoken, fell upon her ears, and exclaiming, "All merciful God, You have heard the poor hapless wanderer's prayers; 'tis he, the poor bereaved old man, father, dear honoured father!" she rushed towards him, frantically sunk before him, and clasping his knees, looked up in his face with an earnestness and agony of expression that was sufficient to move the sternest heart to pity.

The old man stared around him in stupefied amazement, but looked not down upon his daughter, and seemed to be unconscious of her presence.

"Feyther, feyther!" he repeated in wild and melancholy tones; "what bold presumptuous tongue was it that dared to call

upon that once honoured name? The sound was mockery to mine ears."

"Father, dear, muchinjured father," again exclaimed poor Phoebe, with a bursting heart, and clinging frantically to him; "you will not disown me, you will not, cannot cast me from you; oh, mercy, mercy! it is your poor penitent child who now clings to you, and kneels to you for pity and forgiveness, it is your once loved, innocent Phoebe! Oh, father, father!"

"It be false!" cried the distracted man, trying to release himself from her; and every limb convulsed with the power of his agonizing emotions; "I am no feyther now, I have not got the feeling's o' a feyther, they be all dead, buried in the silent grave, withered, crushed, by base ingratitude. I had a good old wife once, a fair and innocent child, but she must ha' died poor thing, sooner than bring her aged parents to disgrace and misery. No, no, I have no child now, I have no dame, the old man be all alone in the world!"

And choked with emotion, the unfortunate Mark Mayfield sobbed and wept bitterly.

"My heart will surely break," ejaculated Phoebe, in tones bordering on those of distraction; "father for the love of heaven do not spurn me from you, but receive me again to your arms, and once more acknowledge me as your daughter, for I am indeed your child, your penitent Phoebe."

"Away, shameless imposter," cried the old man, sternly, "my child was good, pure as untainted snow, and not such a degraded, base, abandoned creature as thou art. Begone! I see wanton written on thy brow, hypocrisy be on thy lips! Away, and hide thy shame and infamy from mortal sight!"

"Nay," exclaimed the wretched Phoebe, still clinging to him deliriously, and detaining him, "you must not, shall not leave me thus; I can die at your feet, but cannot continue to live discarded from your breast, and looked upon by you with disgust and loathing. Oh, mercy, mercy!"

"Release me and let me begone," cried the old man, still trying to release himself; "a poisonous blight seems to fill the air, let me fly the foul contagion. Release me, abandoned girl, lest I curse thee! Away, away, I know thee not, I will not, dare not own thee."

Thus saying, the poor old man, with a desperate and determined effort, tore himself away, and rushed wildly from the cottage. Phoebe followed him on his knees to the door, calling piteously on his name, and then unable any longer to withstand the maddening emotions that rushed tumultuously on her bewildered brain, and filled her bosom,

she sunk prostrate on the earth, and her senses left her.

CHAPTER XL.

CLOUDS OF ADVERSITY STILL DARKEN THE HORIZON. — AN UNEXPECTED RESTORATION, AND A SUDDEN SEPARATION.

Poor old Mark Mayfield on leaving the cottage so abruptly and precipitately, never stopped to look behind him, such was the distraction of his mind, and the wild agony of his thoughts. It seemed as though he was flying from some appalling scene and object, for such was the confusion of his brain that he could not realise what had actually taken place, and reason for the time seemed entirely to have deserted him.

The storm had ceased, but he heeded not the weather, so great and overwhelming was the tempest of feelings that raged within his breast.

He stopped not until he reached his lonely dwelling, which he entered hastily, and sinking in his old arm chair, he resigned himself entirely to the violence of his emotions.

"Could it indeed be her?" he at length exclaimed, suddenly starting to his feet, as recollection once more dawned upon him; "is it possible that in that wretched wasted form, those haggard, careworn, ghastly features, I beheld my once innocent lovely child, who wi' her sunny, joyous smiles lit up every heart wi' gladness, and won esteem and admiration from all who saw her? No, no, I will not, dare not believe it. It wur some cruel bitter mockery got up to delude my senses, and to wring this poor broken heart wi' tenfold agony. Oh, why did I again venture to re-enter that once happy but now deserted home, thus to renew my sorrows, and add to my poignant anguish? Yet the tones of that sad voice thrilled with painful familiarity in my ears, and seemed to penetrate even into the deepest recesses of my throbbing and lacerated heart. And yet I could unpitifully cast her from me, as something loathsome, and refuse to listen to her supplications, to heed her agony and remorse. Oh, surely it was cruel, and inexorable thus to discard an only child from my heart, and consign her to all the horrors of remorse, and misery, and despair! But no, she be no longer child o' mine. Her guilt has torn asunder every tie that bound us together, and curses, bitter curses should alone be coupled wi' her name. I will behold her no more; let me endeavour to abandon the shameless wanton from my memory, and to abandon myself alone to my wretchedness and despair."

Again he threw himself in his chair, and gave full vent to the poignant and overwhelming anguish of his feelings.

It was long after midnight ere the old man sought his couch, but sleep scarcely ever closed his eyelids, and when it did, frightful dreams rendered it still more torturing than his waking moments.

Early the next morning he quitted the house, equipped, as if for a journey, what his intentions were, we cannot disclose at present, but it was evident from the stern and determined expression of his countenance that some stern resolve had taken possession of his mind, and urged him on.

On the eventful evening we have been describing, Henry Ashford and his sister had been on a visit to some friends some short distance from the village, and had delayed their return home in consequence of the rain, which having at length subsided they took their departure.

Notwithstanding all the little pleasures of the merry-making to which they had been invited, both Henry and his sister felt dull and uneasy, for the time for the former to remain on shore was fast expiring, the ship to which he belonged being expected to sail in a few days, and the period that would mark his return to old England being quite uncertain.

Amy looked forward to a separation from that affectionate brother to whom she was so fondly attached, and thought of the many dangers to which he would be exposed, with feelings of the utmost dread, and, he could not but deeply regret that he would have to leave her alone and unprotected for an indefinite period, although he tried to conceal his own feelings in the best manner he could, and to soothe her grief and apprehensions.

There was one thought, however, which constantly haunted the mind of Henry Ashford, and which cost him more real anxiety and anguish than anything else, and that was the uncertainty of the fate which had befallen the unfortunate Phoebe Mayfield, or whether she was living or dead, although from the time which had elapsed since that melancholy and eventful night when he had last met her in London, her mysterious disappearance after his seizure by the press-gang, the distraction of her mind at that time, the destitution of her situation, and the failure of every effort to discover her, or to obtain the least information regarding her, he had too much reason to fear the latter, and moreover, still more painful and awful thought that she had, driven by despair, and goaded on by shame and remorse, perished by her own hands.

It will be seen by this that neither Farmer Hodge nor any of the other rustics had in-

formed him of Phoebe's return to the village, probably in consequence of their feelings; ashamed to do so, on a reconsideration of the harshness of their treatment towards her, but had he been acquainted with that fact, what mingled emotions of astonishment, melancholy satisfaction, and torturing anguish would have been his.

In spite of all that had taken place, and the manner in which she had deceived him, and thus so cruelly blighted all the bright hopes he had so fondly cherished, the fine manly heart of the young mariner still glowed and yearned towards her, and could he but once more behold her, and be certain of her true penitence, he felt certain that he could freely pardon all, and could he but remove the sorrows of the past from her afflicted bosom, and revive those sentiments of pure affection she had once so fervently acknowledged towards him, he would still have felt proud and happy to make her his wife, and thus to convince her of the undying constancy of that love he had always, even under the most trying circumstances, entertained towards her.

The papers which had been found in the coat-pocket of the villain Beaufort, by Bob Bristles the parish beadle, gave rise to strange and perplexing conjectures in the minds of Henry and his sister, for no offers, arguments, or persuasions could induce the sagacious parish functionary to give them up, or to reveal the nature of their contents, though he threw out many notable hints of their importance, and the astounding effect which he imagined he would create, when he thought the proper time had arrived for making them public. Henry could not help entertaining a strange suspicion that they in some way related to Phoebe and Lord Selborne, though how, he perplexed his brain to purpose in trying to imagine.

There was another apprehension which frequently tortured the mind of Henry Ashford, in connection with the hapless and ill-fated Phoebe, which was so fearful and revolting, that he shuddered to entertain it; it was the terrible idea that she had been driven to that life of shame and degradation, which must form the climax to her misery. But no, surely never could Phoebe become so lost to every feeling of virtue, as to resign herself to such a disgusting and abandoned course of crime and infamy. Rather, much rather would he hear of her death, and resign himself to it, than that.

Such were the thoughts that frequently disturbed the breasts of Henry Ashford and his sister, and had occupied their minds during the day that they had endeavoured to pass so agreeably in the society of their friends, and they had in vain endeavoured to

banish them, though they did not communicate their thoughts to each other.

It was quite dark when they departed from the house of their friends, and as it was getting late, they quickened their steps to reach home.

In their way it was necessary for them to pass near the cottage of poor Mark Mayfield, the birth place of Phoebe, and which was once one of the most cheerful of all the humble village homes.

On arriving at it they stopped, and when they gazed at its now wretched, melancholy, and desolate appearance, and marked the terrible change that a comparatively short space of time had wrought, their hearts were wrung with feelings of the deepest sorrow and regret, and the most torturing recollections crowded upon them.

The emotions of Henry were almost too powerful for him to control them, and he gave vent to them in the most melancholy observations.

"Alas," he sighed, "what a painful scene of misery and desolation is this? How fearfully is the scene changed from the once bright home of humble happiness and content, to the abode of gloom and solitude and despair. Where are now those aged people, whose simple honesty, cheerfulness, and integrity of conduct was the respect of all who knew them or came in contact with them? Where is their joyous laugh which made the welkin roar? And where, oh where is that fair and innocent girl, who was the pride and joy of their fond old hearts, and whom every one looked upon as a being formed to love and admire? How sad, how terrible is the answer; the heart sickens, and the tongue trembles to give utterance to it."

Amy sighed, for too painfully did she participate in the feelings that agitated her brother, and to which she had first given utterance, and she was therefore far from being in a position to offer him advice or consolation.

"Come, Henry," however, she said, "do not longer let us linger near a spot which is calculated to excite so many dismal thoughts and feelings in our breasts. It is getting late, therefore we had better hasten on our way home."

"Hush," said her brother, suddenly, and laying his hand upon her arm.

"What is the matter, Henry?" inquired Amy, with a look of surprise; "something seems to excite your attention."

"Did you not hear anything?"

"No; what mean you?"

"There again," said her brother, eagerly, "you surely must have heard that."

Amy did indeed hear a faint, murmuring cry, and it seemed to proceed from the back of the cottage.

"It is the cry of some one in pain," observed Henry. "Come, let us hasten to ascertain the fact."

They did so, proceeding to the back of the cottage, and as they went thither, they could not help feeling a strange but powerful presentiment that some surprise was in store for them.

They listened to hear whether the sound was repeated, but all was now again silent, and it was so dark that at first they could not perceive anything clearly; but they advanced towards the back door, which they had noticed when they passed the cottage in the morning was standing open, and at that moment there being a faint ray of moonlight, which shone immediately on the spot, they noticed the inanimate form of Phoebe lying across the threshold.

"Ah!" exclaimed Henry, eagerly, and every feeling of humanity was immediately aroused within his manly breast; "what poor unfortunate creature is this? It is a female. Alas, what melancholy fate has placed her in so painful a situation as this?"

Tenderly he raised the form of Phoebe from the earth, and supported her in his arms.

"Poor thing," he remarked, compassionately, "her appearance is very wretched, and I fear she has suffered much from privation. She is very cold, but her heart beats faintly. Come, Amy, we must bear her without delay to the nearest cottage. It may not yet be too late to restore her."

As he thus spoke he raised the poor girl—who remained in a perfect state of insensibility—in his arms, and assisted by his sister, whose sympathy and interest were deeply excited, conveyed her a short distance from the cottage, more immediately into the feeble light shed by the moon; but no sooner had its rays fallen upon the pale features of the unfortunate sufferer, than an exclamation of mingled astonishment, grief, and horror escaped the lips of the brother when they recognised the hapless being whose fate had so long been involved in impenetrable mystery, and who had occupied their most anxious thoughts and observations not many minutes before.

They were lost in wonder, and could scarcely believe the evidence of their eyes; and how shall we describe the various emotions that agitated their bosoms, as they contemplated the awful change which time and suffering had wrought in the appearance of the ill-fated girl? Amy was moved to tears, and the anguish and excitement of her brother were almost too great for endurance.

"Phoebe, dear suffering Phoebe," cried Henry, as he strained her emaciated form again and again to his heart, and felt as if

that heart was ready to burst; "and do I indeed once more behold you, and press your still loved form to my throbbing bosom. My brain is bewildered at the thought, and I can scarcely persuade myself that I am not labouring under some wild delusion of the wandering senses. But oh, God! what a terrible wreck is here of what was once so beautiful, so perfect. What a frightful tale of suffering do those pale and haggard features tell. Ill-fated girl, if you have greatly erred, surely you have made more than ample atonement by the dreadful trials you have had to undergo."

He pressed a fervent kiss of affection and commiseration upon her pale cold lips, and was unable to restrain the manly tears that started to his eyes. But he was aroused into more immediate action by Amy, who seeing the wretched and critical state that our heroine was in, and fearful of the consequences, said—

"Restrain your emotions for the present, dear Henry, I beseech you, and let us not delay another moment in conveying the poor girl to some place where proper means can be immediately adopted for her recovery. She is evidently suffering from long and severe privation, anxiety of mind, and exposure to the weather; and it will require the utmost care and constant attention to restore her to anything like convalescence. The cottage of Dame Winfield is the nearest to this, and from her we are certain that she will receive every kind assistance; but I am fearful as the time is getting late, if we do not hasten, she will have retired to rest for the night. So come, Harry, let us begone immediately."

Henry needed no second solicitation to urge him to hasten, and raising the inanimate form of Phoebe, and restraining his emotions as well as he could, he and his sister proceeded as fast as possible to the cottage of the worthy old Dame Winfield, who was the nurse and female physician of the village, and whose humble dwelling was situated only a short distance from the spot.

They soon came within sight of it, and were gratified to find from the light which glimmered in the parlour window, that the old woman had not yet retired to rest.

On knocking at the door, it was quickly opened by the dame, who expressed much surprise at seeing Amy and her brother at that time of the night, especially when she noticed the wretched and senseless burthen which Henry Ashford bore in his arms; but seeing that there was something which called for the prompt exercise of her benevolence and humanity, she asked no questions, but immediately ushered them into her clean little room, and our heroine was carefully

placed in an arm chair before the fire which was still blazing cheerfully in the grate.

But no sooner had they done so, than in the bright red reflection of the fire, the old woman for the first time had a full clear view of the features of our heroine, and notwithstanding the melancholy effect which the ravages of long suffering had had upon them, she recognised them in an instant.

The good old dame's sympathy and emotion were equal to her amazement, for she had brought the poor girl into the world, had watched her progress anxiously from the earliest days of childhood, and she felt for her the same affection as if she had been her grandchild.

No one had regretted more deeply the unfortunate circumstances that had separated Phoebe from her home, and the fatal consequences that followed, than Dame Winfield; no one had deprecated more strongly the conduct of Lord Selborne, endeavoured to exonerate his too confiding victim, and to tranquillize the feelings of her father. But to behold her again after the lapse of so long an interval, afforded her the most unspeakable gratification, while her truly wretched and deplorable condition wrung her to the heart, and the poor old woman laughed and cried alternately in the excitement of her feelings, and the depth of her commiseration.

But the agitation which this unexpected meeting naturally caused the dame, did not retard or interrupt her praiseworthy and humane efforts to restore our heroine to consciousness, and to apply such remedies as might tend to her recovery; all the time expressing, in the most sincere but simple terms her mingled emotions of surprise, satisfaction, and sorrow, bustling about with the activity and energy of a young girl.

In these laudable exertions she was assisted by Amy, whilst Henry stood by and watched the result with a fear, an anxiety, and trepidation which may easily be conceived.

But although the endeavours of Dame Winfield and Amy were not without effect, as Phoebe breathed somewhat more freely, and some warmth was imparted to her limbs, she yet showed but little signs of returning life; so severe was the shock her system had sustained from mental and bodily suffering, and the agony, the fears, and suspense of Henry Ashford were increased almost beyond endurance.

"Poor dear soul," said the dame, compassionately, "she is indeed in a sorry condition, and it must be a hard heart that could not pity her. Alackaday, who would have thought it would ever have come to this? The pretty little thing that I nursed in infancy, and whose-innocent gambols I have so often watched with feelings of delight.

Ah, she was a lovely little fairy, and it was enough to break one's heart to see her thus. Alas, what she must have had to undergo to reduce her to this deplorable state."

"I shall go distracted," exclaimed Henry, unable any longer to control his feelings; "unfortunate Phoebe, oh, why did not providence guide your footsteps hither long ere this? What a world of suffering might it not have saved you. Alas, the fearful trials to which she has been for so long a time subjected, are beyond all human endurance. She will never recover."

"Calm your feelings, young man," remonstrated the dame, "for such lamentations, and dismal forebodings are useless. Providence is good, and I trust, will in time restore the poor girl not only to health but happiness. But this is not the time to waste in words. Prompt measures must be taken for her recovery, and one of the likeliest remedies to have that effect is to place her immediately in a warm bath, if Miss Amy will render me her assistance. As for you, Henry, I would advise you to return home, as it is probable that the poor girl will not be in a fit condition to be removed for two or three days, and you can do no possible good by remaining here."

"True," observed Amy, "go Henry, and rest satisfied that nothing shall be wanting on my part or that of the good dame, to promote the recovery of poor Phoebe. In the morning when you visit here, I trust that you will hear a favourable account; but remember that the utmost precaution must be used, in not making your meeting with Phoebe too sudden."

To this Henry assented, and then again kissing the pale lips of the insensible girl, with fond and fervent emotion, he reluctantly quitted the cottage, leaving Amy to assist Dame Winfield in her humane exertions.

His thoughts were of the most melancholy and painful description as he slowly bent his footsteps towards home, and various were the dismal fears and misgivings that beset his mind.

The pale, haggard, careworn features of the wretched Phoebe Mayfield, were still as painfully and vividly present to his imagination as if he stood before her, and his heart was wrung with feelings of poignant anguish which he found it utterly impossible to subdue.

All her former conduct towards him, her broken vows, and the fond hopes that she had blighted, were forgotten in the present misery of her situation, and his heart bled for the almost unexpected sorrows that had marked the destiny of the once happy village maiden.

"Oh, Phoebe, most unfortunate of wo-

men," he sighed, as he still continued on his way, "how little did I dream, when in the sunshine of our youthful love, we pictured to ourselves bright visions of youthful bliss, that so sad, so awful a fate was in store for you, or that our wishes and expectations were doomed to so fearful a disappointment. What would I not willingly give, what sacrifice is there that I would not freely make, could I but restore you to health and peace? But, alas, that, I fear, is hopeless. Oh, may heaven's curses pursue the heartless villain who has been the cause of all this. Selborne, guilty man, how much have you to answer for. You have destroyed one of nature's most beautiful works, and spread ruin and desolation where once all was prosperity and happiness."

He beat his breast as these thoughts arose to his mind, and thus with a sad heart he entered his cottage, which now under the circumstances that had just occurred presented a most gloomy and cheerless aspect to his imagination.

He threw himself in a chair—for he could not think of retiring to rest—and the most terrible fears and anticipations continued to rack his brain. Sometimes he was worked up to such a pitch of excitement, and so fearful were the ideas that flashed upon his disordered imagination, that he started from his seat, as a sudden impulse urged him to return to the cottage of Dame Winfred, fearing that something fatal had either happened or was about to happen to Phoebe, and such was the singular effect and impression that this idea had upon him, that he could almost imagine that he heard her voice calling in agony upon his name, and reproaching him for his absence in her dying moments.

It was with difficulty that he could make up his mind to remain at home, but satisfied that, if any more alarming symptoms took place, his sister or the dame would lose no time in apprising him of it, he at last endeavoured to compose himself, and to await till morning the result.

The reflection that so soon after meeting with Phoebe, and when she would so much require his protection, could not a reconciliation be effected between her and her unfortunate father, he should probably have to separate from her, with the uncertainty that they would ever meet again, caused him the bitterest regret, and he now, for the first time, looked upon the perilous life into which circumstances had forced him, but to which he had become attached, with a feeling bordering upon repugnance.

"Alas!" he exclaimed, "during the time that I am away from the happy shores of old England, and exposed to all the perils of the boundless deep, what fresh troubles may not

you, my still beloved Phoebe be exposed to? What fresh devices may not be formed by the machinations of the guilty to further persecute you, and drive you to the lowest depths of misery and despair? And who will there be left to shield you from those dangers? I tremble with apprehension, yet know not what course to adopt to avert the evils that I anticipate."

The hours wore tediously away, Henry never attempting to retire to bed, for he knew that it would be impossible for him to rest, with these thoughts racking and bewildering his brain, and, unable any longer to endure this state of suspense, as soon as the first blush of day appeared in the eastern horizon, he hastily left home, and with a palpitating heart, he made his way to the cottage of Dame Winfield.

In the meantime, after Henry had left them, and they had placed Phoebe in a warm bed, the dame and Amy redoubled their exertions to restore the poor girl to life and animation, which they continued unremittingly for some time, with little or no effect. In fact, she was so much reduced that her recovery seemed painfully doubtful, and the anguish of Amy Ashford in particular, and her apprehensions as to the final result, increased every moment.

Still Phoebe breathed more freely, lay calm and agitated, as if in a deep sleep, and seemed to be unconscious of any pain.

One of their principal efforts was to impart warmth to her limbs, which, on being first taken into the cottage, were cold as death, and in this, after much trouble, they succeeded and the blood seemed once more to circulate freely through her veins, and this greatly revived their hopes.

"Poor girl," said the dame, "with the blessing of God, I trust that our endeavours will not be in vain, and that she will shortly be restored to sensibility. But oh, how fortunate it was, Amy, that you and your brother discovered her when you did, for had she remained probably for even the shortest time longer in the situation in which you found her, there is no doubt but she must have perished."

"True," coincided Amy, "and I shudder to think of it. Unfortunate girl, what will be her feelings when she revives to consciousness, and finds that she is in the company of friends who would do anything to serve her and restore her to happiness?"

"Yes," observed the dame, "the sudden surprise might be too much for her in her present delicate state, and the utmost precaution must be used."

To this Amy assented, and they continued to watch with the greatest solicitude by the side of the couch of the sufferer, being un-

remitting in their endeavours to restore her to sensibility.

It was not till towards the morning that poor Phoebe evinced any signs of returning life, and she then after a slight tremulous movement, opened her eyes, and with an effort raising her head from the pillow gazed vacantly around her, bewildered and unconscious where she was.

Gratified at the success of their exertions, Amy could not repress a faint exclamation of satisfaction, which caught the ears of Phoebe, much to the regret of the dame, and turning hereyes in the direction where Amy was seated, she seemed to recognise her in a moment. The sudden surprise, and the shock occasioned by the various emotions that at the moment rushed tumultuously on her brain were to much for the poor girl, and with an exclamation of agony, she again relapsed into insensibility.

"This is most unfortunate," said the dame, "and I fear will retard her recovery, for in her present delicate and precarious state, she is but ill-calculated to bear so unexpected a surprise. I regret that you happened to be in the room at the time that she revived, for had I broken the truth to the poor thing gradually, this probably would not have taken place."

"True, true," coincided Amy, "and no one can more deeply lament the occurrence than myself. Unfortunate Phoebe, what a melancholy fate is your's; alas, when will your troubles have an end?"

Once more they renewed their exertions, but it was long ere they were crowned with anything like success, and when Phoebe did revive, and look around her, it was evident from the wild expression of her eyes, and the rambling observations that escaped her lips, that her mind wandered, and that she had not the slightest idea where she was, or who was present.

In plaintive tones of the most bitter anguish, she called upon the name of her father, appealed to him for mercy, and implored his forgiveness; then she clasped her hands vehemently together, and burst into a violent paroxysm of grief that was quite piteous to listen to.

Amy was deeply affected, but cautiously seated herself behind the curtains of the bed, and scarcely dared to breath lest she should again attract the attention of Phoebe, and excite her in the same painful manner that she had done before.

Dame Winfield, however, in the most gentle words of kindness, endeavoured to recall the wandering senses of the hapless girl, and to soothe her into tranquility, but without the least success, and she seemed to become even worse every minute, the symp-



rooms being so alarming that it appeared that it would be absolutely necessary to call in medical assistance, if a favourable change did not shortly take place.

It was at this time that Henry—whose thoughts had been of the most torturing description on the road—arrived at the cottage, and the agony of his mind on hearing of the deplorable and alarming state of Phoebe, may be readily imagined, and it was with difficulty that his sister—who was in the parlour at the time of his arrival, having left the worthy dame in charge of the invalid only a few minutes before—could dissuade him from rushing at once into her chamber, so anxious was he again to behold her.

He beat his breast in despair, and, if anything had been wanting to convince him of the fervour and sincerity of the passion he

still entertained for the unfortunate girl, it would have been fully satisfied by the powerful emotions that agitated his breast at that moment.

"Alas," he exclaimed, "long suffering, want, and misery have done their work, and her system has at length sunk under their baneful influence. Poor Phoebe, whatever your errors may have been, you little deserved so cruel a fate as this. Kind heaven look down with mercy upon you."

To this prayer his sister most fervently and sincerely responded, and she then exerted all her gentle influence to soothe the poignancy of her brother's grief, in which, after a time, she succeeded much better than might have been anticipated, and after some further conversation, and strictly enjoining his sister to let him know immediately should

any unfavourable change take place, he took his departure from the cottage deeply wrapped in painful thought.

"Oh, Phoebe," he soliloquised, as he slowly retraced his steps towards home, "how fondly does my heart still yearn towards you, in spite of all that has taken place, and I feel that all my hopes of future happiness are centered in you, and that no other woman can ever find the same place in my affections that you so firmly occupy. But what are the sentiments that you entertain towards me? Do you ever recalc to your memory the happy days of our youthful love, and cherish the recollection with feelings of pleasure, not unmingled with regret that adverse fate should ever have banished the blissful dream? or are your affections all buried in the wrongs you have experienced, the cruelty of your guilty betrayer? Oh, what torturing feelings of mingled doubt and fear does that thought give rise to in my bosom; and with what anxiety do I await the moment of our meeting. May kind heaven realise my fondest wishes, rekindle the passion, dearest Phoebe, which I know you formerly so warmly so sincerely entertained for me, and bury the painful past in oblivion."

The latter ideas somewhat re-animated the young seaman's spirit, and revived his hopes, but when he recollected how short the time was that he probably would be permitted to remain on shore, and the uncertainty whether they would ever meet again, he again abandoned himself to the most melancholy feelings and gloomy apprehensions.

In this mood he reached home, and there, throwing himself into a chair, he for some time became lost and bewildered in torturing and conflicting thought. He feared that the system of Phoebe had received so severe a shock, and was so reduced, by sufferings almost too great for human nature to endure, for her to recover, and that thought was of itself more than sufficient to excite the most agonising emotions in his breast.

But he could not long remain at home in that painful state of suspense, and again he hastened to Dame Winfield's cottage, in order to ascertain the state of the poor sufferer.

Fortunately the dismal forebodings that had haunted Henry's mind were not doomed to be realised, for on arriving at the cottage, and seeing his sister, he had the unspeakable gratification to hear from her that Phoebe had revived to consciousness, had recognised her, and greeted her with tears of affection and gratitude, and had anxiously inquired after him, and evinced such emotion when Amy informed her of the sentiments which he still so ardently entertained towards her,

that fully convinced her that he continued to occupy a warm place in her heart, and that the fatal sentiments she had for a time so unfortunately felt for her betrayer, were now changed to those of disgust and abhorrence.

It was impossible for Henry to control the feelings that now agitated his breast, on receiving this information.

"Dear, unfortunate girl," he exclaimed, "how does my heart leap with emotions of joy and gratitude to hear this, and to know that I am still remembered by her with feelings of regard. May kind heaven quickly restore you to health, to hope, to tranquility, and if I can but be the means of effecting this, oh, what happiness will it afford me. But why should I any longer delay the melancholy pleasure of our meeting? Conduct me to her, Amy, for I am all impatience until I have once more clasped the poor sufferer to my throbbing heart, and listened to the tones of that gentle voice which ever fell upon mine ears like the melody of heaven."

"Restrain your feelings, Henry," replied his sister, "and await calmly the fitting time for the meeting, which I trust there will be no occasion to delay longer than to-morrow. Phoebe is at present in a tranquil sleep, which I hope will be productive of the most beneficial and happy results, but her constitution is so greatly impaired by long and terrible suffering, and which it is truly wonderful how she could ever find strength or fortitude to bear up against, that the greatest precaution is absolutely necessary, for any powerful excitement in the present delicate state of her health, could scarcely fail to be productive of the most serious, if not fatal consequence."

"True, most true, Amy," coincided her brother; "and to your tender care and that of good Dame Winfield, I will with confidence leave the poor girl, certain that everything that humanity can suggest will be done for her. But oh, Amy, assure her how fondly her image is still enshrined in my heart, how fervently I sympathise with her in the unmitigated and unmerited sorrows and misfortunes it has been her hard lot to endure; that my every thought and anxiety is for her future welfare and happiness. But her unhappy parent, he must be informed of her return, and surely when he again beholds her, and hears the terrible sufferings she has undergone, he can no longer withhold from her his forgiveness, but take her once more to his aged heret."

"Alas!" sighed Amy, "I fear the realisation of that hope must yet be delayed. They have seen each other, but a short time before our arrival at the deserted cottage of poor old Mark Mayfield where we found the unfortunate Phoebe, the painful meeting took

place, but the wretched father refused to recognise his penitent child, and in the frenzy of his disordered brain threatened her with his curses. Vain were all her tears, her prayers, and supplications, he turned a deaf ear to them, and casting her from him as a thing of hate, left her to all the horrors of misery and despair.

"Unfortunate old man," said Henry, in a voice of the deepest regret; "but this is no more than I too fearfully anticipated. May providence restore his wandering senses, and yet bring about that reconciliation we so anxiously hope for. I must see the poor old man, and endeavour to arouse him to reason."

"And may heaven reward your praiseworthy efforts with success, Harry," ejaculated his sister, "but we must be careful how we allude to that delicate and painful subject in the presence of Phoebe, lest it should tend to aggravate her sufferings and retard the progress of her recovery."

To this Henry agreed, and at his request Amy left him for a few minutes to go to the chamber of the invalid, and ascertain her present state.

She quickly returned, and informed him that Phoebe still slept calmly, and that all seemed progressing as well as could be expected, which assurance, it is almost needless to say, afforded him the most unbounded satisfaction, and he again quitted the cottage with renewed hope, and anxiously anticipating the result of the interview with the poor girl he so fondly loved on the following day, should she happily be sufficiently recovered to leave her bed, which he firmly trusted she would, under the assiduous care of his amiable sister and the kind-hearted Dame Winfield.

In the meantime he resolved to seek an interview with the unfortunate old Mark Mayfield, and for that purpose instead of immediately returning home, he made his way to the ancient and lonely house in which he had secluded himself.

On arriving there, he knocked loudly at the door, but it remained unanswered, and he could not help encouraging the apprehension that something serious might have happened to the old man, after the excitement no doubt caused by his meeting with his daughter. In the wretched and disordered state of his afflicted mind, there was no knowing to what desperate act he might be driven to commit. He did not like to leave the house until he had satisfied himself that Mark was not within, but after repeating the knock several times with the like result, and the door being secured, he was at a loss how to gain admittance, unless he could do so by one of the lower windows. He tried several

without being able to open them, but one, at the back of the house yielded to his efforts, and raising it, he entered the room on which it opened.

The usual death-like silence reigned throughout the dreary building, and none of the doors being fastened, Henry proceeded without obstruction to the room which he knew was chiefly occupied by the old man, and finding that he was not there, he went to the chamber in which he slept and which was vacated in the same manner.

Finding that poor old Mark was in no part of the building, Henry quitted it by the same way he had entered it, and slowly retraced his way homewards, still entertaining the same apprehensions that something fatal had befallen the unfortunate man after his interview with Phoebe, and which filled his mind with the greatest anxiety, not only on the account of Mark, but likewise that of his daughter, who was so ill-prepared to encounter any fresh calamity.

The hopes that Amy had so sincerely expressed to her brother, were happily realised, for after remaining in a calm sleep for several hours, Phoebe awoke much refreshed, and the favourable change that had taken place, was more than could have been reasonably expected in so short a space of time.

Dame Winfield, who had continued most unremitting in her kind and benevolent attentions, and Amy, could not but express their satisfaction in the warmest manner, and a most affecting scene then took place between poor Phoebe and her friends, the former for some minutes giving free indulgence to the feelings that agitated her breast in sobs and tears, which they thought it would not be advisable for them to seek to restrain, as it might afford her some whole-some relief.

But when this ebullition of emotion had in some measure abated, and she had become more calm, she threw herself in the arms of Amy and gave expression to her feelings of gratitude for the kind attention she had received from her and the worthy dame, in language as affectionate as it was sincere and fervent.

"Dear Phoebe," said Amy, "I must entreat you not to give too much way to the excitement of your feelings in your present weak and exhausted state. Thank heaven that you are restored to us, and that you have hitherto been enabled to withstand the dreadful trials to which you have so long unfortunately been subjected."

"And you do not despise and loathe the wretched wanderer, the unfortunate outcast from every hope?" sighed Phoebe, in tones so melancholly plaintive, and looks so sad and agonising, that were enough to move the

most insensible heart to pity, "you will not discard me from your gentle bosom, and look upon me as one so fallen and degraded that she is unworthy of anything but the disgust and execrations of her fellow creatures?"

"God forbid that I should ever become so cruel and unjust towards one who has I am convinced been far more sinned against than sinning," replied Amy, "and who has already had to endure so severe and terrible a punishment for any errors of which she may have been guilty. May the Almighty look down upon you with mercy, and restore you to that peace and happiness from which you have so long unfortunately been estranged."

"Oh, this is most kind, most affectionate," said Phoebe, "and how can I ever sufficiently, dear Amy, express my gratitude. Your gentle words of comfort fall like the soothing balm of heaven upon this poor lacerated heart, and impart a ray of sunshine and hope in the midst of my misery and despair. Bless you, bless you, my dear friend, for such I know I am permitted to call you. Oh, could my faltering lips dare repeat the fearful tale, you would indeed see how dreadful have been my sufferings. Heaven only knows how I have been enabled to survive them; it is wonderful that my heart did not long since break, and the silent grave close over my earthly sorrows. But there is one whose name I dare scarcely mention, but upon whom my thoughts have often been most anxiously fixed. Your brother, Amy, oh, what of him?"

"His heart, my brother's manly heart, is still your's Phoebe, in spite of all that has happened," replied Amy, "and no one can more deeply sympathise with you in the misfortunes to which you have been exposed, and the cruel wrongs that have been done you."

"No, no," said our heroine, with the most powerful emotion, "I dare not hope for, or expect that. She who so heartlessly deceived him, and broke those vows she had so often and so solemnly pledged to him, must be unworthy of anything but his scorn and hatred. It is impossible that he can look upon me with any other feeling. Oh, how deeply have I wronged him, and can I ever expect to receive his forgiveness, or to meet with anything but his bitterest reproaches?"

"Be calm, Phoebe, I implore you," remonstrated Amy, "and give not way to those dismal thoughts. You do indeed wrong my noble-minded brother if you believe him capable of conduct so harsh, so ungenerous, and unjust. Did you but know what he has suffered at your misfortunes, and how anxious he is to again behold you, and assure you of the ardent love that has never ceased

to glow in his bosom for you, you would be convinced beyond all doubt of the truth of that which I have asserted."

"Noble Henry, how unworthy am I of this solicitude, this consideration, and forbearance," sighed Phoebe; "may you be happy in the possession of the hand and heart of some other woman every way deserving of your manly virtues."

"No other woman than Phoebe Mayfield can ever possess the sincere and ardent love of my brother," returned Amy, "on no other woman will he consent to bestow his hand."

"Never, never can I permit the sacrifice," cried Phoebe, vehemently, and tears gushing to her eyes, "the lost, the fallen Phoebe, the discarded mistress of one for whom she abandoned home, friends, lover, parents, everything, can only hope for obscurity and the agony of remorse."

"Say not so," said Amy, affectionately, "you reproach yourself too severely, and I hope the time is not far distant when happiness will once more dawn upon the gloom and sorrow of the cruel fate which has hitherto so unfortunately pursued you."

"Alas, I cannot dare not hope that what you so kindly predict can ever be realised," sighed our heroine.

"You must endeavour to do so," observed Amy, "and I am confident that all will yet be well. But pray endeavour to compose yourself, and to muster up all your fortitude to be able to grant my poor brother that meeting he is so anxious to obtain."

"Oh, how can I ever form the resolution to do so?" returned Phoebe, "and yet my heart eagerly throbs for the interview, and—but where do my senses wander? How can I dare hope for composure after my torturing fearful meeting with my poor broken-hearted father? My blood freezes with horror when I recal it to my memory, and madness seizes upon my brain. Oh, God, how terrible were his looks, how appalling the words with which he cast me from him, refused to acknowledge me for his child, and heaped upon me his hatred and reproaches. There is no hope for an accursed, abandoned wretch like me, but to die and hide my degradation in the grave."

Convulsive sobs choked her further utterance, and covering her face with her hands, she sank back on the pillow completely overcome by the power of her emotions.

Amy and the dame were deeply affected, and alarmed lest the excitement under which she now laboured, and which they had both endeavoured to prevent, should cause her to relapse into that deplorable state from which she had so recently revived.

They tried all they could to console her, but for some time without the least effect,

but at length they succeeded partially in doing so, and a copious flood of tears seemed to afford her great relief.

The remainder of the day she kept on improving under the care of the dame and Amy, and the latter lost no time in informing her brother, for she was well aware how impatient he would be to know, and his satisfaction at the intelligence may be easily imagined.

Phoebe passed a tranquil night, and the next morning such a wonderful and rapid improvement had taken place, that she felt better, much better than she had done for many months before, and expressed a wish to leave her bed.

Having done so, and being perfectly composed, Amy ventured to inform her that her brother had been waiting for some time below, most anxious and impatient to see her, if she thought she could find fortitude sufficient for the interview.

A slight tremor came over the poor girl at this intimation, she hesitated, and tears came to her eyes as she said.

"Generous, noble-hearted Harry, oh, can you indeed forgive the misguided being who so heartlessly deceived you, and blighted the fond hopes you had even from boyhood's earliest days cherished? Can you possibly look upon her with any other feeling than that of shame and contempt. Oh, how keenly do I feel my own degradation, and I shrink from this interview with the conscious dread of the greatest criminal. I cannot, dare not meet one whom I have so cruelly injured, and of whose respect I have rendered myself so entirely unworthy."

"For heaven's sake, my dear Phoebe, arouse yourself from this gloomy and torturing state of mind," said Amy, "and endeavour to meet with firmness and composure him whose manly heart still throbs so fondly towards you, and who is so anxious to forget the dismal past in the joy of the present. Come, come, cheer you, my unfortunate friend, sister, for as such alone do I look upon you, as such do I sincerely, affectionately regard you."

"Dear, kind, gentle Amy," exclaimed our heroine, throwing herself upon her bosom, overpowered by her emotions, "you were an affectionate sister to me, but unworthy have I proved myself of your regard. Never, never, did I feel more bitterly my own guilt than at this moment."

"No more, Phoebe," remonstrated Amy, "your words pain me. Surely you reproach yourself too severely. But again I beg of you to summon fortitude to your aid, and no longer keep my poor brother in a torturing state of suspense."

"Heaven help me and give me strength

for this painful task," ejaculated Phoebe, in a voice of extreme agitation, and clasping her hands together. "Your arm, dear Amy, I will meet him, even though it be to listen to his bitterest reproaches."

Amy and the dame—who did not think proper to be an intruder upon the interview—encouraged the poor girl with a smile, and with trembling footsteps, and a wildly palpitating heart, she suffered her amiable friend to conduct her from the room.

Torturing indeed was the state of suspense with which Henry Ashford had been waiting in the little parlour the appearance of his still beloved Phoebe, and he sometimes became so impatient that he was half resolved to hasten up stairs, and thus precipitate the meeting. Various and painful were the thoughts that crowded upon and agitated his mind, as he paced the room to and fro with disordered footsteps, but gratitude to heaven for the present recovery of the poor girl predominated over every other feeling in his breast, and considering the dreadful state to which she had been reduced from long continued suffering, he could not but consider it all but miraculous.

The delay of every moment seemed to be an age to him, and he listened with breathless attention to catch the sound of her footsteps and those of his sister upon the stairs.

Ever and anon their voices reached his ears, though he could not distinguish a word they uttered, and the melancholy and plaintive tones of poor Phoebe thrilled upon his heart with a powerful emotion, which convinced him more than ever how entirely that heart still acknowledged her its mistress. Yet when he thought of all the melancholy circumstances connected with her fate, and the numerous difficulties and sorrows by which it was still surrounded, especially in regard to her unfortunate father, he could not but suffer the most painful doubts and apprehensions as to the result to distract his mind.

"May heaven mercifully watch over her, and restore her again to that peace of mind to which she has so long been a stranger," he said; "and, oh may her wretched parent be again awakened to reason, and cause him to receive once more to his arms that poor child whose penitence is so sincere and fervent."

He was interrupted in this soliloquy, by the opening and shutting of the room-door above, then the sound of light footsteps descending the stairs, met his attentive ears, and the moment the parlour door was opened by Amy, Henry rushed hastily forward, there was a half frantic shriek, and Phoebe Mayfield sunk insensible in the arms of that faithful lover whom she had in an evil hour

deserted, and whom she had never expected to behold again.

CHAPTER XLI.

FIRST LOVE.—A RAY OF SUNSHINE.

How is it possible to describe the mingled emotions of joy, sorrow, hope and fear which agitated the breast of the young seaman as he pressed convulsively the still lovely, though emaciated form of Phoebe to his heart, and gazed in her pale countenance, which in years gone by, ere misfortune had cast its shadows o'er their fate, had ever smiled on him so fondly. What a tumult of torturing feelings rushed upon his brain, as he recalled to his memory the happy, joyous, innocent being she then was, and beheld her wretched, careworn, heart-broken, and broken in constitution as she was now. The contrast was so painful that it almost overpowered him, and in spite of his efforts to restrain them, manly tears started to his eyes, and he felt as though his heart would burst. Again and again he clasped her close to his bosom, and pressed the most fervent kisses of affection on her pale lips, while his sister stood by, deeply moved, but without attempting to interrupt him in the expression of his feelings.

"Phoebe, beloved Phoebe," he exclaimed, "and do I indeed once more clasp your beloved form to my throbbing heart, and gaze again upon those beauteous, but now careworn features, which sleeping or waking, have ever been present to my imagination? All merciful providence I thank you. But alas, how sad, how torturing is it to contemplate the awful change which time and suffering have wrought, in this fair being, to view the terrible wreck of what was once perfection, shedding happiness and sunshine upon the path of all who knew her. May eternal curses light upon the head of the heartless villain who has been the cause of all the misery."

"I fully appreciate your feelings, my dear brother," observed Amy; "but you must endeavour to restrain them, for should poor Phoebe become too much excited, it would be better if this interview had not taken place at present, as it might be productive of the most serious consequences. See, she revives, be calm and cautious."

With a sigh, our heroine did revive from her temporary insensibility, and breathing his name in a half stifled voice, and fixing upon him a look of the most indescribable emotion, she burst into a flood of tears, and her head sunk upon his bosom.

With rapture he strained her convulsively to his heart, and for a few moments his agitation was so great that he could not trust himself to give utterance to the words that arose to his lips.

"Phoebe, ever beloved Phoebe," he at length exclaimed; "poor suffering victim of a cruel and remorseless fate, thank the All merciful God who has heard my prayers, and restored you to that devoted heart which through weal or woe has never ceased to throb for you. Oh, the bliss unspeakable, yet sorrow of this meeting. Speak to me, my own dearest Phoebe, assure me that I still hold a place in your affections, and render me by so doing one of the happiest of human beings. Oh, let me again hear the beloved tones of that sweet gentle voice, I have in transport, so often listened to."

He felt her heart throb violently against his, and her limbs tremble, as he thus spoke, then she gently raised her head from his bosom, and fixed her eyes, still swimming in tears, upon his countenance with an expression of such intense affection, yet melancholy regret and anguish that must have moved the hardest heart to pity.

"Henry, faithful, much wronged Henry," she sobbed, "what feelings of anguish struggle in this poor desolated breast at this moment. Mingled joy, and gratitude, and sorrow thrill throughout my veins, and my throbbing heart seems ready to burst from its tenement. But no," she added with a shudder, and shrinking from his embrace; "I dare not, must not gaze upon him whom I so wantonly deceived, and abandoned, and left to misery and regret. The burning blush of shame rises to my cheek, when I think of the guilty past, and I feel myself a wretched degraded creature, worthy alone of your scorn and hatred."

"Forbear, dearest Phoebe, I implore you, if you would not drive me to distraction," replied Henry; "oh, why thus cruelly reproach yourself for that for which you have so dreadfully suffered, and already made more than ample atonement? You have been the unfortunate victim of the most consummate villany, and surely the curses of heaven will pursue him for the base and treacherous part he has acted towards the innocent the confiding girl who in a fatal moment yielded to his insidious artifices, little suspecting the cruel, the diabolical snare that was laid for her destruction. Oh, Phoebe, can you doubt the feelings that agitate my breast at this moment? How sincerely my heart sympathises with you? Away with all remembrance of the gloomy past, you are still my own beloved Phoebe."

"Oh, heartless being I must be, ever to deceive one so good and generous, so faithful

and affectionate," sobbed Phoebe, in a voice almost choked by the intensity of her emotions; "I feel myself undeserving of your forgiveness, and yet I know not what it was that hurried me on to destruction. Some fatal spell seemed to be upon me—I must have been mad—yet so powerful was the influence that my guilty betrayer had obtained over me, that I could not resist the terrible infatuation. It was a fearful dream which had taken possession of my senses, and from which I was only to awaken to all the horrors of shame and remorse."

"As a dream, Phoebe, then," observed her lover, "let us endeavour to view the painful past, and to look forward to the future with hope and happiness."

"Happiness," repeated our heroine, in a voice of the most impressive melancholy, "alas! it can never again be mine. Flatter me not with hopes, Henry, that can never be realised; when I think of the misfortunes, the horrors of which I have been the guilty cause, I shrink appalled, and my guilty conscience goads me on to the very depths of despair. My brain maddens as I reflect. Did not my cruel desertion break the heart of one of the best of mother's, and has it not driven my poor father to madness? Oh, never, never can I forget the poor old man's wild looks of agony—his fearful words—his bitter, but just reproaches, when I knelt at his feet, in all the overwhelming anguish of remorse, and implored his forgiveness; and he disowned me, cast me from him with disgust and loathing, half-breathing curses on my guilty head. And can a miserable outcast like me, e'er hope again for peace and happiness? No, no, no, there is presumption, there is mockery in the thought. Leave me, Henry, despise, shun me, loathe me, gentle Amy; let me again become a wanderer o'er the face of the earth, the fallen, guilty Phoebe Mayfield has no claim upon the sympathy of her fellow creatures."

With a shudder she drew herself from the embrace of Henry as she uttered these words, and sinking in a chair, buried her face in her hands, and sobbed hysterically.

Henry Ashford was so bewildered and agitated by the various emotions which almost overwhelmed him, that he knew not what to say, what to do to soothe the poor suffering girl, whose every word had pierced his heart with agony; and his sister was as deeply affected as himself. But fearful that the trial might be too much for Phoebe, she was anxious not to prolong the scene, and kindly approaching her, and taking her hand in the gentlest accent she said—

"Oh, why, Phoebe, will you thus give way to despair, and close your heart to every feeling of hope and comfort? Heaven is

good and merciful, and believe me, as it has preserved you hitherto through all the terrible adventures it has been your hard lot to encounter, so will it ere long restore you to peace, if not to complete happiness."

"It will," added Henry, eagerly, "I feel satisfied that it will, and that the heavy clouds that have so long darkened the horizon of your happiness will be dispersed, and bright sunshine succeed the gloom with which your fate has so long been overcast. It will be the constant study of myself and sister to bring about the realisation of those wishes, and oh, what happiness will it afford us can we be the means of contributing to so joyful, so desirable an end. Come, Phoebe, it makes my heart bleed to see you resign yourself to this state of mental anguish and despondency; I beseech you, by the love you formerly avowed for me, and which I cannot but fondly believe you still cherish for me, to exert all your energies to regain tranquillity, and rest assured, in spite of all that has taken place, the love of Henry Ashford is, and must ever remain the same for Phoebe Mayfield, as in those blissful days, when we knew no pleasure if absent from each other's society, no joy so great as in the expression of our mutual affections. Oh, let me but see a smile once more irradiate those beloved features, that sweet, that heavenly smile, which was ever present to my imagination in the dreary midnight watch while tossed about on the blue waters of the ocean; say but the blissful words that I still hold a place in your heart, and I shall be the happiest, the most blest of human beings."

"Henry, ever dear and faithful Henry," exclaimed the poor girl, once more throwing herself convulsively in his arms; "the poor penitent wanderer has no will but yours, no hope, no prospect of future happiness but in you. Her heart, that heart which is almost broken, with its latest pulsation, must throb alone for you. Bless you, bless you, Henry, I am your's only, evermore!"

"Heavenly words!" exclaimed the enraptured young man, straining her to his bosom, and kissing away the tear drops that trembled on her cheek; "now indeed are my fondest wishes accomplished, and the sorrows of the dreary past may be forgotten. Phoebe Mayfield still loves me, and I am happy."

It was some minutes after this ere the lovers could regain their composure, but the looks of Phoebe, and the faint smiles that played upon the pale features, shewed that for the first time for many, many months, a sunny ray of hope and happiness had beamed upon the gloom of misery and despair which had so long enshrouded her careworn mind; and need we say with what powerful emotions Amy had witnessed the affecting scene.

After a time they were enabled to talk more calmly, and the dame having joined them, heartily expressed her satisfaction at the happy result of the interview, which was far more favourable than the most sanguine hopes could have anticipated.

It was not till the evening, and after they had arranged everything for the future residence of Phoebe at the cottage of Henry and his sister, and that she should remove there on the following day, that the former took his departure, a happier man than he had been for many a day; and Amy remained behind, unwilling to leave Phoebe alone to the society of Dame Winfield, in which she might feel dull, and probably relapse into that utter state of despondency from which for the present she had been so happily aroused.

Amy endeavoured to divert her thoughts from the gloomy retrospect of the past in the hope of the future; and when Phoebe alluded to the fearful meeting which had taken place between herself and her unfortunate father, with feelings of the most poignant anguish, Amy exerted herself to the utmost to banish it from her thoughts; and to comfort her with the hope that the time was not far distant when the aged Mark would recover from the fatal malady which now affected his reason, and receive her again to his heart with all that warmth of affection which he had once bestowed upon her.

In these praiseworthy efforts Amy at last partially succeeded, and Phoebe became comparatively calm, and at an early hour retired to her chamber for the night, whither Amy accompanied her.

That night poor Phoebe, for the first time for a long period, experienced a respite from the fearful miseries it had been her terrible fate to encounter, and hopeful visions of the future rendered the hours of sleep happy and refreshing.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WARNING, AND THE ADVENTURE IN THE CHURCHYARD.

Henry, on parting with Phoebe and his sister, proceeded with a light heart, now buoyed up with hope, on his way home.

"Dear girl," he said, "kind Providence, in the midst of all your sorrows has not deserted you, and the time, I trust, will yet come, when happiness will again be restored to you, and the horrors of the past be buried in oblivion. I feel the fond sentiments with which that gentle being from boyhood's

earliest days inspired me, glowing with renewed fervour in my breast, and exciting every thought and wish to future bliss. And she loves me still, her lips have avowed it. Blessed assurance, it has snatched me from despair, and pointed out the path to halcyon bliss. Beloved Phoebe, great as has been the trial to which your fatal passion for the villain Selborne has subjected him, your faithful Henry will never, never reproach you, but make it the study of his future life to calm the rude tempest which so long has distracted your mind, and to contribute to your happiness."

But still in spite of all, some gloomy thoughts and forebodings would obtrude themselves upon his mind, and which he found it difficult to banish. One of the principal of these was the certainty of his being speedily compelled to join his ship, and to depart from England for an indefinite period, and the idea of a separation from Phoebe just at that critical period, was torturing in the extreme, and filled him with dread as to what might happen to her and his sister when deprived of his protection. He now deeply regretted that he had continued to pursue a nautical life after his discharge from the first ship in which he had served, although his manly and courageous spirit warmly attached him to the service, and he had ever remained undaunted in the hour of the greatest danger. He, however, endeavoured to banish these gloomy thoughts from his mind, and to look forward with hope to the future.

There was another subject which also caused him considerable anxiety of mind, and that was the unfortunate malady with which the brain of poor old Mark Mayfield was afflicted, and the little prospect that there was at present of his being restored to reason, so that there might be a probability of a reconciliation between him and Phoebe being effected. Could he but see that desirable object accomplished, and Phoebe received again to her father's arms, previous to his departure from his native land, he thought he could be content.

These reflections reminded him of the disappearance of Mark from the old house, which had excited some strange fears and suspicions in his breast, and before he returned home, he resolved to repair to the lonely retreat of the old man in order to ascertain whether or not he was still absent.

He was not long in arriving there, but although it was now dark, he did not perceive a light in any of the windows, which made him imagine that Mark was not within, for he knew that he seldom retired to rest till long after the hour of midnight, but would sit gloomily brooding over his sorrows,



and talking wildly to himself, and sometimes he would be thus occupied for the whole of the night.

He however, knocked loudly at the door as he had done on the previous occasion, and receiving no answer, he went round to the back of the house, to see whether the window was still unfastened, as he had found it before, and discovering it to be so, he imagined that Mark still remained absent, which again excited his suspicions.

He, however, determined to satisfy himself that the poor old man was not within the building, and he therefore again entered at the window, and proceeded over the whole of the rooms which the house contained, but found them all entirely deserted.

His fears and suspicions that something serious had happened to the old man were
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now greatly strengthened, the more so in consequence of the anguish it would naturally cause Phoebe, when the fact should be revealed to her.

"Unfortunate man," he said, as he slowly departed from the ancient building, the gloom and solitude of which was chilling to the feelings, and sufficient to give rise to the most dismal thoughts, "too much do I fear that you have been hurried by madness to some untimely end, and if so how fearful may be the troubles that are yet in store for my poor Phoebe. I tremble at the thought of breaking the melancholy and painful intelligence to her, and the hopes that I had ventured to indulge in begin to subside. Alas, will the sorrows of that unhappy girl never be at an end?"

He sighed deeply as these reflections

crowded upon and racked his brain, and with the most dismal forebodings, he emerged from the house, and was about to proceed on his way, when he was startled by the sudden appearance of the shadow of a human form on the earth, and raising his eyes, he beheld standing immediately before him, in the dim uncertain light, a strange looking being, who seemed determined to obstruct his path, and whom he could not easily avoid,

As well as he could distinguish, it was the haggard form of an old woman, bent double with age and decrepitude, miserably clad and supporting herself on a staff, while her eyes which flashed with a disagreeable expression, were fixed intently upon him.

He gazed with some amazement at this singular being, whose attitude was fixed, and from whose lips issued a strange unnatural murmuring sound, something between a wail and a laugh of derision.

Ashamed of the momentary feeling of awe which the appearance of the woman had caused him, Henry hastily approached nearer to her, and he then had a more distinct view of her features, which were most repulsive but she moved not, and seemed by her looks to enjoy the surprise and confusion which he evinced.

It was the strange gipsy sybil who had appeared to Phoebe and Lord Selborne on two or three occasions ; but Henry knew not that, and had no recollection of ever having seen her before.

"What is the meaning of this, woman?" he peremptorily demanded, vexed at the boldness of her demeanour, "why do you obstruct my path, and what is your business with me?"

"To warn you," replied the sybil, "that the troubles of yourself and Phoebe Mayfield are not yet at an end. The hopes you fondly venture to indulge in, Henry Ashford, are not fated to be realised till many a bitter pang hath wrung both your hearts."

"Mad woman," said Henry, impatiently, "think you that your silly and idle predictions can have any other effect on me than to excite my scorn. Begone ; your insolence is offensive, and I am in no humour to listen to you."

"And yet, young man," returned the gipsy, "you may ere long find that my warnings are not to be despised. Phoebe Mayfield has already found the truth of that, for had she heeded my words, and retraced her steps in time, the seducer's guilty designs would have been defeated, and how many of those fearful sufferings it has been her fate to experience, what feeling of shame and remorse might she not have been spared. But she, like you affect to do, treated my

predictions with scorn, and need I tell you what have been the consequences?"

There was an earnestness about the old woman's manner which gave a remarkable effect to her observations, and Henry could not fail to be impressed by them.

"Strange woman," he demanded, "how have you acquired the knowledge that you pretend to."

"It matters not," she replied, "that which I promise never fails to be fulfilled. Will you be convinced of my power, if I tell you the thoughts and feelings that now occupy your breast?"

"It is impossible," said Harry, incredulously, "I degrade myself by condescending to listen to you. No longer detain me, woman, but away."

"Nay, you must, you shall hear me," said the sybil, determinedly, "you still love the wretched victim of the betrayer's artifices, in spite of the deceptive part she acted towards you, the way in which she broke the vows she had so often and so solemnly pledged to you. 'Tis well, she also returns your passion, but mark me, Henry Ashford, ere she can become your wife, human blood must be shed, murder must be committed."

Henry started, and, in spite of himself, the tones in which the gipsy uttered this strange and awful prognostication, and the confidence with which she seemed to speak, excited in his breast a feeling bordering upon terror ; but before he could recover himself sufficiently to put any farther questions to her, she moved hurriedly from the spot, and disappeared in the darkness.

Henry was so surprised at this strange adventure—which had more the appearance of romance than reality—that he stood for a minute or two in a state of confusion and bewilderment, and gazing eagerly in the direction where the old gipsy sybil had disappeared. But he quickly recovered, and chiding himself for his weakness, he hastened from the old house towards his home.

"Fool that I was," he said, "to stop to listen to this mad woman. At any rate, I should now treat her observations with the contempt which they alone merit."

But he could not treat them so lightly as he proposed to himself ; there was a tone of seriousness about the sybil's extraordinary predictions that made a strange impression on his mind, in spite of his efforts to the contrary, and he gloomily pondered on them as he proceeded on his way.

He never remembered to have seen the old woman before, and yet she seemed to be familiarly acquainted with him, and all the circumstances connected with himself and the unfortunate Phoebe. And what could be her motives for thus crossing his path

and giving utterance, in the apparent spirit of prophecy, to the strange observations she had? They did not seem to be dictated by feelings of malice, and why should they be so, since he being unacquainted with her, could not possibly have given her any cause of offence; and he knew not, in fact, to what to attribute her conduct, seeing that she had nothing to gain by it.

The truth with which she had described his thoughts and wishes, his feelings, and his passions, and also those of Phoebe, startled him, and the longer he ruminated, the more did he become lost in astonishment and perplexity. How had she acquired her knowledge? By what means did she penetrate the secrets of his breast, and foretell that which was to come, with such apparent confidence and earnestness? For a time his scepticism was shaken, and he was half inclined to become superstitious, while her solemn and dread prognostications that there were more troubles in store for him and Phoebe, and that murder must be committed ere their union could take place, excited in his mind a sensation of fear and dismal foreboding, which, although he endeavoured to treat with indifference and contempt, he could not conquer.

The wild and unearthly appearance of the sybil, too, was calculated to excite a certain feeling of awe in the mind of any person, and to leave behind an impression of the most bewildering and disagreeable nature, and such was the effect that it now had upon Henry Ashford.

"How strange is this adventure, and to what can it tend?" he questioned himself, still unable to dismiss the subject from his thoughts, "but, psha," he added, "why should I suffer it to annoy me thus? I am ashamed of myself to think that I should give one serious thought to the wild and ridiculous freaks of some poor lunatic, one of the gipsy tribe whose trade it is to prey upon the credulity of the weak for the purpose of extortion. And yet she could hardly suppose that I was a man likely to be thus imposed upon, and she did not even give a hint of such a design. Away with such perplexing thoughts, I will no longer entertain them. Dear Phoebe, you are restored to me, and I will cherish the fond hope that all the sorrows that have so long afflicted you, and worn you almost to the grave will soon be at an end, and that future happiness will reward your patient endurance."

A loud and scornful laugh burst upon his ears, as he uttered these words, and he started with astonishment, and hastily looked in the direction whence it seemed to proceed, which was a cluster of trees a little to the right of the path he was pursuing.

The darkness would not permit him to perceive anything distinctly, but advancing nearer to the place, determined, if possible to ascertain the meaning of this disturbance, at the moment a form, which as well as he could distinguish, was that of the gipsy sybil, rushed quickly from behind the trees, and ere he could dart forward to try to detain her, glided away with a speed which was quite surprising in one apparently so old and feeble, and was immediately lost to the sight in the darkness, and as if by magic.

He stood for a minute, again lost in wonder and perplexity.

"This is intolerable," he said; "this singular old woman seems to take delight in annoying me, and sporting with my feelings. She must have watched me from the cottage of Dame Winfield. But surely her conduct is only worthy of my derision, and so will I treat it."

Having come to this conclusion, he regained his composure, tried to think no more about the circumstance, and proceeded on his way.

The way to his cottage lay through the old churchyard, and in the present state of his mind, he entered it with a feeling of awe, and something like dread, which was quite unusual to him.

The moon had now arisen, and the solemn effect which its pale light had upon the tombstones, the silent tenements of the dead, and the old ivy-covered church, tended to increase the gloomy thoughts that occupied Henry's mind, and it was in vain that he endeavoured to arouse himself from them.

He stopped involuntarily at the humble grave of poor Dame Mayfield, and as he gazed upon it, melancholy indeed were the reflections that obtruded themselves upon his mind. He recalled to his memory all the terrible circumstances of that fatal evening of the elopement of Phoebe, and the death of her mother, and the torturing recollection revived all those emotions that had agonised him at the time. Alas! to what a series of troubles and misfortunes to all those concerned, did the fearful events of that evening form the prelude. He shuddered even now to look back upon them. But anxious as he was to banish such dismal thoughts from his mind, they continued to crowd upon it, and he could not withdraw himself from the spot, but remained with his eyes fixed sadly and pensively upon the grave.

"Poor old woman," he said, "your's was indeed a sad and untimely fate; heaven rest your soul in peace, and may you receive that reward to which, while on earth, your numerous virtues entitled you. And oh, may your bright spirit watch over, pardon, and protect my beloved Phoebe, that daughter

whom in life, you cherished so fondly in your bosom."

He had scarcely give utterance to these words when a strange wild laugh resounded in his ears, and which at that hour, and in that sacred place, had a particularly awful effect; it was succeeded by wailing cries and lamentations, and presently, and before Henry could sufficiently recover himself to move from the grave of the poor old woman, there arose from behind a tomb, where he had been concealed, the form of a man, which in the moonlight was plainly revealed. Had Henry Ashford been at all superstitious, he might have believed it to have been the ghastly phantom of one of the dead, so sudden, and so vision-like was the appearance of the form, arising as if from the earth, and, in fact, he was rather startled, but all doubts were quickly dispelled, the face was turned towards him, so that it was clearly visible in the moonlight, and the pale, the frenzied, and almost unearthly looking features that met the gaze of Henry, were those of him about whose fate he had felt so much anxiety, the unhappy Mark Mayfield.

Calling upon the old man's name in accents of pity, Henry rushed towards him, with the object of arresting him in his progress, but he seemed even in his madness—for there could now be no possible doubt of his absolute insanity—to anticipate his design, and with another loud laugh, which rang fearfully throughout the dreary old churchyard, he fled, leaping over the grave-stones with all the agility of youth, laughing wildly as he went, and bidding fair in his extraordinary speed, to outstrip even Henry.

On he went, nothing appearing to impede his progress, and Henry following, and calling in vain on him to stop, and he had quickly cleared the old churchyard, making his way towards the wood.

His clothes were torn and hung in tatters around him, he was without hat, and his gray hair floated on the wind. With unabated speed he continued his flight, and Henry, although he exerted himself to the utmost, seemed to gain but little upon him, and at last his foot coming in contact with something on the ground, he stumbled and fell, and being stunned and breathless, with the pursuit, it was two or three minutes ere he could recover himself sufficiently to regain his feet, when he did so, poor old Mark had got to such a distance that Henry could scarcely distinguish his retreating form, though the distant sound of his wild, idiotic laugh, still rang in his ears.

But, completely hopeless as it appeared to be, Henry determined not yet to abandon the pursuit, and he was about to follow, when the sybil suddenly emerged from an

enclosure, and standing before him, arrested his progress.

"Stand aside, woman," he said, peremptorily, vexed at the interruption; "this insolence is unbearable."

"I am used to command, young man," replied the gipsy in tones of mingled scorn and menace; "I am used to command, I repeat, not to be commanded. It is useless for you to continue your pursuit, see, the old man has outstripped you, and is now far beyond your reach."

"What is your motive for thus annoying and obstructing me, old woman?" angrily demanded Henry, having looked in the direction which Mark Mayfield had taken, and seeing nothing of him. "You seem to possess some bad feeling towards me, but why, I am at a loss to conjecture, for I know you not."

"I owe you no ill-will, Henry Ashford," replied the woman; "but the will of fate must be obeyed. Return to your cottage, prepare to receive your lover in the morning, and remember the words that I have spoken to you."

"Stay, mysterious being," said Henry, "I must and will know more about you."

But she was gone, and so suddenly that Henry had not time to notice the manner of her exit.

Vexed and disappointed at being thus frustrated in the accomplishment of his object, he stood for a minute or two undecided how to act.

"How perplexing and provoking is all this," he said; "this strange being seems to sport with me, though for what reason I know not. Unfortunate Mark, it is now too evident that what little spark of reason you had remaining, has fled, and in your madness you may now rush upon self-destruction. You should ere this have been placed under control, then the dreadful calamity which I cannot but anticipate, might have been prevented. Alas, how shall I be able to break the melancholy facts to Phoebe? And yet it is impossible that she can long be kept in ignorance of them. The too sanguine hopes I had ventured to encourage on her restoration, I fear are not fated yet to be realised, and heaven only knows how the poor girl will be able to sustain the many troubles that are yet too probably in store for her."

These thoughts tortured him, and again abandoning himself to the most dismal apprehensions, and discouraged by the events that had taken place since his parting from Phoebe's society, he slowly bent his way towards his cottage.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MARK MAYFIELD'S MADNESS.

The abrupt departure of Mark Mayfield from the old house the morning after the exciting meeting with his unfortunate daughter, has been related in a previous chapter. What his intentions were it would not be easy to conjecture, and in the disordered state of his mind—for his brain was now tottering on the very verge of confirmed madness—it was not likely that he had any decided purpose himself. It seemed as if the lonely house in which he had so long secluded himself, and which so well accorded with the gloom and misery of his thoughts and feelings, had now become hateful to him, and that the sight of his wretched daughter, instead of awakening him to reason, and moving his seared heart to feelings of pity, and parental affection, had the contrary effect, and that he sought to escape from the terror and disgust of encountering her again.

For hours he wandered on in an uncertain direction, but avoiding the villages, and any person whom he happened to encounter on the way, and fearful was the expression of his features, wild his demeanour, as he proceeded, sometimes running at the top of his speed, swinging his arms above his head in the air, and mingling shouts and laughter, and lamentations together. Madness had taken absolute possession of the poor old man's brain, and terrible and deplorable indeed were the consequences that were likely to follow.

The whole of that day the wretched maniac continued his flight, scarcely ever pausing to rest himself—for he seemed to be proof against fatigue—and without tasting food, or even quenching the burning thirst which parched his throat, and added to the fever of his brain, for he sedulously avoided every place where it might have been given to him in charity, and by the time that the shadows of night had fallen upon the earth, he had got to a considerable distance from the old stone house, and was brought suddenly to a standstill on the brink of a river.

Here he remained for several minutes, with his eyes fixed earnestly upon the water, and muttering strange and incoherent words to himself.

All was darkness and solemn silence around, not even the gentlest murmuring of the wind could be heard.

Suddenly a desperate and fearful thought seemed to break through the madness of the old man's brain, and a frenzied laugh escaped him, and was re-echoed from afar.

"Ha, ha, ha," he again laughed, as he

looked with flashing eyes into the river, and tottered dangerously upon its brink, "she be there, her pale face, her mild beaming eyes, her extended arms, inviting me to her cold embrace, be before me. Dame, dame, the poor old man will no longer tarry from thee in this lonely world, where all be desolation, misery, crime, pollution. I come, dame, I come."

Raising his arms above his head, and uttering a frantic exclamation, he was about to precipitate himself headlong into the river, when he was arrested in his dreadful and fatal purpose, by two labouring men from behind, and forcibly dragged from his dangerous position on the river's bank.

Returning home from their daily labour, and having to pass near the river, the wild laugh of the wretched maniac attracted their notice, and they hurried to the spot just in time to save him from the awful fate on which he was about to hurry.

The wildness of his looks, and the desperate act he was about to commit, left no doubt as to the insanity of the poor old man, and they therefore sought to induce him to leave the spot, so that, with every humane feeling, they might conduct him to some place of security, where his melancholy case might be properly attended to, until it could be ascertained who he was, and whether he had any friends or relations.

But the unfortunate Mark finding himself thus interrupted and coerced, became perfectly frantic, and struggled to release himself from the hold of the men, with a strength which madness alone could impart, raving all the time in the most fearful manner, and bursting from them, in spite of all their efforts to detain him, he fled with a precipitation which rendered pursuit perfectly hopeless, and quickly disappeared from the sight.

He stopped not till compelled to do so from pure exhaustion, and sinking upon the earth, panted for breath, every limb trembling with convulsive emotion, and the perspiration bathing his temples.

It was a lonely and unfrequented spot to which he had now wandered, and near where he had thrown himself, there stood an old ruined hovel, which had formed the miserable shelter to many a poor houseless wretch, from the raging tempest. Many, many, when the wintry blast howled fiercely around, and frost and snow were upon the earth, had entered there to die, unhonoured, unpitied, uncared for.

After awhile poor Mark partially raising himself from the earth, and glancing around, and beholding this hovel crawled towards it, for he had not strength sufficient to gather himself to his feet, and entered it, for the door had long since fallen away from its

hinges, and there was nothing to obstruct his ingress.

With difficulty he drew himself into one corner of the wretched place which was better sheltered from the weather, and there sinking inanimate on the cold damp earth—for all signs of flooring had long since disappeared—he fell into a deep torpor, for it could scarcely be called sleep.

In this state the poor old man remained the whole night, and not again aroused to anything like consciousness, till the early morning's sun was stealing into the dreary and wretched place, around which his eyes wildly and vacantly wandered, although reason was too far gone to enable him to imagine where he was.

Rest had recruited his bodily strength evidently—for he arose hastily to his feet—but the frenzy of madness still held possession of his brain, and he rushed from the ruined hovel, and resumed his strange wanderings, as he had done the day before, avoiding the high road, and every town and village, taking the most lonely and unfrequented route, sometimes running and shouting and laughing, till he panted for breath, and at others relaxing in his speed, and assuming a sullen and moody air.

Probably his only motive—if, in his insanity, he might be supposed to have any—for this strange conduct, was to fly from his ill-fated daughter, who was now an object of terror and hatred to him, instead of one of delight and love.

Poor old man could you have been aroused once more to reason, and have been convinced how terrible and manifold had been the sufferings, the wrongs, and degradations that hapless girl had been fated to undergo, how would your heart have melted to pity, and how eagerly would you have again received the poor penitent to your bosom, and learned to have buried the gloomy past in oblivion.

Nothing could possibly now be more deplorable than the unfortunate maniac's appearance, and it must have excited the deepest feelings of compassion in the breasts of all who at that time might have had an opportunity of beholding him. His clothes, which were old and threadbare, were torn and disordered from his desperate struggle with the two men who had rescued him from self-destruction, and exposed his naked skin in many places. His face and hands were extremely dirty, for it was several days since he had washed himself; his hat he had unknowingly left behind him in the old hovel, and his long, thin, silvery hair hung wild and dishevelled about his neck and shoulders.

What a melancholy contrast did he present to the once clean and neat, and happy,

merry-hearted Mark Mayfield, as he appeared on the memorable and fatal evening of the festivities in the Hazel Dell, when dressed in all his holiday gear.

It is needless now to recount his wanderings during this day, as they were similar to those of the first, and marked by no particular incident worth recording; but, in his madness, after taking a wide circuit, he had unconsciously retraced his steps, and again when the darkness of night had enveloped the earth, he found himself standing near the entrance of the old churchyard.

A fearful yell of disappointment and agony escaped his lips, when this fact forced itself upon his benighted reason, and he beat his breast and tore his hair in the terrible excitement of his feelings.

While he stood, apparently uncertain which way to go, but at length, with a hurried and disordered step, he entered the churchyard, and traced his way among the tombstones to the grave of his wife, on which he prostrated himself, and after a paroxysm of hysterical sobs, and mournful lamentations, for a time he became lost to everything around. Again he revived, and raised himself on his knees, and the next moment his quick ear, susceptible of the least sound, caught the noise of approaching footsteps, and with the speed of lightning he hurried from the grave, and concealed himself behind the tombstone, from which Henry Ashford, to his astonishment, had beheld him so suddenly arise.

What followed has been already related. The poor old man had again resumed his mad flight, but accidentally in a different direction from that which he had pursued before, and what befell him will be related hereafter.

CHAPTER XLIV.

PHOEBE'S NEW HOME.—HOPES AND FEARS.

Henry Ashford passed a restless night, for the strange and alarming events which had occurred continued to occupy and harass his mind, notwithstanding his endeavours to banish them from his thoughts, or to treat them, at any rate, with indifference.

He trembled at the thoughts of the terrible effect the awful state of her unfortunate father would naturally have upon Phoebe, when she should be made acquainted with it, and it was not possible that the truth could be concealed from her for any length of time; and great was his anxiety for the poor old man also, for there was every cause for the worst apprehensions. It was now quite evi-

dent that the imbecility with which he was before afflicted, had assumed the form of confirmed madness, from which, if he was even saved from self-destruction, it was too much to be feared, he would never recover. And then the time would arrive—he knew not how soon, perhaps to-morrow—when he (Henry) might be summoned to go on board his ship—which was at present lying in harbour at Hull—and she would then be deprived of all protection and consolation save that which his sister could afford, and alas, ere, long ere he could again return to England—if it was the will of providence that he should do so—poor Phoebe might have sunk under the weight of those sorrows that so fast accumulated upon her, and which it was almost impossible to bear.

It was those thoughts, as has been stated before, that kept Henry waking and restless nearly the whole of the night, and yet he tried to the utmost to combat them, and to prepare himself for the reception of Phoebe in the morning.

He could not but feel surprise and somewhat ashamed at himself for allowing the idle predictions of the old gipsy woman to make so strong an impression upon him as they certainly had done, but in spite of all his efforts he could not forget her words, or rid himself of the apprehensions which they created.

Morning came, a bright cheerful morning, seeming to smile and glisten with hope and happiness, and under the genial influence of the weather the spirits of Henry revived, and, anxious and impatient, he issued from the cottage, not waiting the arrival of Phoebe and his sister there.

It is almost needless to say that he took the way to the cottage of Dame Winfield, thinking that he should probably meet them on the road, and as he proceeded, the gloomy and torturing thoughts that had occupied his mind for so many hours, gradually dispersed and his heart felt light and buoyant with expectation and hope.

He pictured to himself the happy home which his dear Phoebe would find in his comfortable though humble dwelling, and in the society of his amiable and gentle sister—who he knew felt a sister's warm affection for her—and himself, and he thought that in time, she must become reconciled and resigned, and even happy.

In fact, Henry was now in the humour to look on the bright side of everything, and to cast away all dismal thoughts and forebodings.

This happy feeling strengthened as he proceeded, and his delight may be imagined when in emerging from the lane which led to Dame Winfield's cottage, he beheld Phoebe,

supporting herself on the arm of Amy—in one of whose neat and pretty dresses she was attired—just issuing from the door.

With a joyous exclamation he flew towards her, and Phoebe, who had beheld him at the same moment, advanced to meet him, and, smiling as she was wont to do in happier days, though tears trembled in her eyes, with undisguised affection, and the tenderest emotion, she sunk in his arms, and the sobs which escaped her bosom, as Henry, enraptured, pressed her to his throbbing heart, spoke far more eloquently than words could possibly have done.

Dame Winfield and Amy stood by, and contemplated the scene with feelings of sympathy and satisfaction, and did not attempt to interrupt the lover's, but allured them to give free indulgence to their various emotions.

Divested of her late miserable apparel, and dressed with neatness and taste, Phoebe did now begin to look like herself again, and the careworn expression of her features was much diminished, a slight flush, from the excitement of her feeling, suffused her cheeks, and her eyes, although they shone not with their former lustre, beamed with serenity and hope.

Henry and Phoebe, as has been before stated, were suffered to give vent to the fond emotions that agitated their breasts, for a few minutes without interruption, but the dame at length suggested that they should return into the cottage for a short time till they had recovered their composure.

This proposition was agreed to, and they soon recovered themselves sufficiently to talk calmly and hopefully of future prospects.

After a short time passed in this manner, the final departure took place, Phoebe's still weak and trembling limbs, fondly supported by Henry and his sister, and Dame Winfield watching them at the door of the cottage till entering the house were hidden from her sight.

"God bless them," said the worthy dame, as she re-entered her neat and comfortable little parlour; "for I'm sure their good qualities entitle them to every happiness. Poor Phoebe, may the clouds of adversity that have so darkened your fate at length disperse, and your future days be those of happiness and prosperity."

Dame Winfield having thus given utterance to her good wishes towards those for whom she felt so sincere a regard, she busied herself in her domestic affairs, singing merrily as a young girl, as she was wont to do, all the time.

In the meantime, our hero and his fair companions proceeded on their way, the former taking care to avoid the deserted

cottage of Mark Mayfield, and all those scenes which might awaken painful thoughts and reminiscences in the breast of Phoebe.

It was long ere the young seaman had felt so happy and light of heart, and both himself and sister endeavoured to impart the same feelings to the mind of Phoebe. She fully appreciated their affectionate solicitude, her heart overflowed with gratitude for it, and she tried to gratify their wishes, and to appear content, if not happy.

It was some time before they came in sight of the cottage of Henry and his sister, so pleasantly situated in a peaceful valley, at the foot of a lofty hill, and with a little rivulet flowing gently past—for Phoebe's weakness would only allow her to walk slowly—and when she saw that humble but comfortable dwelling, which for the present was to form her home, and contrasted it with the misery she had so long endured, she could not refrain from tears, and they were compelled to pause to enable her to recover her composure.

"You weep, dear Phoebe," said Henry, tenderly, "but I trust that the tears you shed are those of joy. Heaven be thanked that has restored you to us, and for enabling us to offer you a home, which although humble, is one of comfort and peace."

"Oh, I am unworthy of it," sighed our heroine, in a voice of the deepest emotion, and the tears streaming down her cheeks; "the wandering outcast merits not such kindness. I feel, I deeply feel my own unworthiness, and shrink from the idea of becoming a burthen to those on whose consideration and benevolence I have no claim."

"Cease, dear Phoebe, I implore you," said Amy, tenderly, "your observations, so unjust and uncalled for, are painful to myself and my brother. Forbear to reproach yourself so severely; take comfort—banish such gloomy thoughts from your mind—and trust to Providence for the future."

"Come, Phoebe," said Henry, "you will not give way to these fits of melancholy I am certain, when you know the anguish it causes me and my dear sister, who was ever your warmest friend."

"Oh, she has been most kind to me, ever most affectionate, much more so than I have deserved," replied Phoebe, "it is the thought of that which overwhelms me. Oh, why was I ever tempted to abandon happy scenes like this, in which my innocent days of childhood were passed? Bright, sunny days of tranquillity and joy, never, alas, I fear, fated to return!"

"Cheerly, cheerly, dearest Phoebe," said the young seaman, looking in her face with the most pure and ardent affection, "you must not thus give way to despair. Come,

let us into the cottage, for even after this short journey you must feel fatigued, in your present delicate state."

Phoebe did make an effort to regain her composure, and with a faint smile, she suffered Henry and his sister to conduct her into the cottage, where the neatness, cleanliness, and comfort of all around, so forcibly reminded her of her own home, that her feelings again overpowered her, and sinking in a chair, she burst into tears.

Amy and her brother, who did not think it prudent to interrupt her grief, which if suffered to have free vent, might probably afford her relief, seated themselves on either side of her, and in silence watched her with the deepest sympathy. But our hero could not help feeling a degree of happiness that he had not for a long time experienced, and he inwardly thanked the Almighty that the poor girl was now safe under his humble roof, and protected from the dangers that she might otherwise have to encounter.

By degrees the emotions of Phoebe subsided, and she was able to converse calmly and even freely, and indeed to listen to the sanguine hopes that Amy and her brother expressed, and the prospects of the future which their imaginations painted in such glowing colours with some degree of confidence.

Amy and her brother carefully avoided making any allusions to what she had undergone, for they were fearful of the painful effects they might produce; but Phoebe seemed to think otherwise, and appeared anxious to disclose all, doubtless with the hope that it would afford her some relief, better than by keeping it all confined to her own breast, to rack her mind by constantly pondering over. She therefore, in the course of the day related all those melancholy particulars—her strange and fearful adventures, and unparallelled misfortunes and sufferings with which the reader is already made acquainted.

Need we describe the anguish of our hero and his sister, their heartfelt sympathy and regret, as they listened with breathless attention to the exciting and pathetic narrative? But how could they sufficiently deprecate the cruel and heartless conduct of Lord Selborne? In what language could they express their admiration of Phoebe's patient endurance—the heroic fortitude which had sustained her throughout such dreadful and unequalled trials? And how boundless was their gratitude to the infinite mercy of that Omnipotent Power that had watched over and protected her amidst an accumulation of horrors, that it seemed almost impossible for any human being to endure or survive.



Frequently during the course of the melancholy recital, they were compelled to interrupt her, to give expression to their feelings, and when poor Phoebe had concluded, it was some time ere they could regain sufficient composure to make use of any observation.

"Oh, Phoebe," at length exclaimed Henry, "poor suffering victim of a cruel fate, how has my heart bled at this terrible recital of your misfortunes. But with that feeling of sorrow and regret, is mingled one of gratitude and pleasure, for it proves how much your errors have been exaggerated, and how cruelly you have been wronged, betrayed, sacrificed to the accursed passions of a base, a deep designing villain."

"Alas," sighed our heroine, "that I could believe myself less culpable than I know

myself to be. But I cannot. It is impossible for me to exonerate myself. I know my errors—if I dare call them by so mild a name—and bitter indeed is my remorse, sincere my penitence. Was I not most guilty in listening to the flattering tongue, and yielding to the base persuasions of another, after the solemn vows of unalterable affection I had so often pledged to you, Henry? 'Twas most cruel, 'twas most treacherous, and I cannot recal it to my memory without feelings of horror, disgust and shame."

"Cease, Phoebe, I implore you," said Henry, "I cannot, dare not listen to your cruel self-reproaches."

"I deserve them all and more," replied Phoebe, "my guilty conscience ever tells me, in a voice that will be heard, what a wretch I have been; and it is useless for me to

seek to deny my guilt. Oh, was it not a monstrous act to desert my poor parents even at the very time when they believed me all that was good and innocent, and would either of them willingly have laid down their lives for me, if it could have been the means of promoting my welfare? Dare I deny my guilt, and remember that it was I who broke my mother's heart? Dare I deny my guilt when I think of my poor bereaved and wretched father, and recal to my mind the horrors of that night, when I ventured to present myself again to his disgusted sight, and crouching at his feet, in accents of maddening agony supplicated his forgiveness? Can I ever forget the fearful looks of the poor gray-headed man? Can I ever banish from my recollection his withering words, his terrible reproaches? Oh, no, it is impossible; and therefore must I continue to believe myself one of the most guilty and wretched of human beings."

Convulsive sobs choked her farther utterance, and throwing herself back in her chair, she covered her face with her hands.

Henry and his sister were deeply affected, and the latter used her utmost endeavours to soothe the unfortunate girl, for her brother felt himself totally inadequate to the task."

Any allusion that she made to her father at present, caused Henry considerable uneasiness and alarm, for he feared to make her acquainted with the recent circumstances connected with the unhappy old man, and his mysterious disappearance from his lonely dwelling—of which his sister was as yet in ignorance, as he had had no opportunity of informing her—and it was only natural that she should be anxious to know every particular.

"And where is that unfortunate father?" she sobbed forth after a pause, "what has now become of him? whither does he wander since he hath abandoned his once happy home? Oh, tell me, I implore you, that I may once more seek his presence, if it be only to hear his curses, and to die at his feet."

It was the very question that Henry had so much dreaded, and his agitation was so great that he could not speak.

"Ah," cried our heroine, wildly, laying her hand upon his arm, and fixing her eyes upon his countenance with a searching intensity that increased his emotion, "you do not answer. What terrible meaning does this silence convey? Something fatal has happened to him, since my fearful meeting with him in the deserted cottage; I read it in your looks, and you tremble. Henry Ashford, I solemnly charge you, as you value my further esteem, my love, keep me not in suspense. Remove, or confirm the

dreadful suspicions that beset and torture my mind."

"Oh, why will you urge those questions at the present moment?" said Henry, "why not defer them till you are in a more fitting condition to converse upon so painful a subject?"

"Nay," said Phoebe, impatiently, and with increased excitement, "your hesitation does but serve to strengthen my worst surmises. Tell me, again I earnestly beseech you, where is my unhappy parent?"

"I will answer you, Phoebe," replied Henry, after a pause, and seeing that it was no use to endeavour to evade her urgent questions, "but I pray you to listen to me with firmness and patience. Ever since your poor father abandoned the cottage he has taken up his residence at the old stone house, and has carefully avoided all society; but now—"

"Ah," she exclaimed, breathlessly, "you again hesitate, and your looks evince still greater emotion. Proceed—proceed."

"Your father has disappeared from the old house," answered Henry, reluctantly, "and I know not what has become of him."

Phoebe uttered a cry of agony, and sunk back in her chair insensible, and Henry and Amy were filled with anguish, and knew not what course to adopt to counteract the effects of the violent shock this intelligence had caused to her feelings.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE SUMMONS FROM THE SHIP.—THE DEPARTURE OF HENRY.

By the prompt and assiduous exertions of Amy and her brother, Phoebe soon revived, but the anguish of her feelings at the uncertainty of her father's fate, and the horrible conjectures her worst fears excited, were almost beyond consolation, and she felt so ill that Amy advised her to retire to her chamber, with which she complied, and the former accompanied her, and conducted her to it. And thus passed the first day of Phoebe's residence in her new home, Amy sleeping in the same chamber with her, and endeavouring all she could to calm the agitation of her feelings, in which she at last succeeded, and, after having enjoyed a pretty tranquil night's sleep, Phoebe arose the next morning much refreshed, and in better spirits.

Henry felt relieved from considerable anxiety now that he had broken the truth to Phoebe, which must have been revealed sooner or later; and when they met in the

morning, he was glad to see that the exertions of his sister to soothe the anguish of her mind had not been in vain, and that she was much more composed than he could reasonably have expected after the powerful emotion she had evinced on the previous night.

He endeavoured to persuade her that her father was safe, and would shortly return to his dreary residence, and that no exertions should be wanting on his part to discover him, and place him in that position that the opportunity of a meeting and a reconcilliation might happily be effected.

With this Phoebe sought to be satisfied, although under all the circumstances, she could not but yield to the most melancholy misgivings.

Amy and her brother then sought to divert her mind from the painful subject, and to encourage her with the idea that her troubles would soon be completely at an end, and that happiness was in store for her, but although Phoebe made no reply, she shook her head, and her looks fully showed how little she participated in their sanguine expectations. Anxious, however, to convince them how warmly she appreciated their kind wishes and attentions, she did exert herself to appear tranquil, and at times even cheerful, and they could not but flatter themselves with the hope that in time her grief would become greatly ameliorated, if not entirely destroyed.

The news of our heroine's return, and of her being at the cottage of Henry Ashford, her former lover, and the circumstance caused no little interest and excitement among the inhabitants of the village, and those who had known her in the days of her happy innocence, and still esteemed her for the numerous virtues which they were convinced she possessed, and pitied her for the one false step by which she had plunged herself into so much disgrace and misery.

Farmer Hodge, however, still remained prejudiced against the poor girl, and entertained the same harsh feelings towards her as those which had caused him to turn a deaf ear to her supplications on that melancholy day when he and his companions had encountered her in the village, and, when not even her wretched appearance, or starving condition, could move him to compassion.

That high official dignitary, too—as he considered himself—Mr. Bob Bristles, although he honestly expressed his sympathy for her, and his firm belief in her perfect innocence, obstinately persisted in maintaining the most profound secrecy as regarded the mysterious papers he had found in the pocket of Captain Beaufort, stating that the

fitting time had not yet arrived for him to divulge the contents, but that when it did, he would astound them all, and cover himself with official glory for his remarkable skill and sagacity.

Those papers had often occupied the thoughts of Henry and his sister, and various were the conjectures they had formed upon them; but they had thought it better not to mention anything of the circumstance to Phoebe, or it might cause her anxiety, more especially as nothing could persuade the beadle to give them up, or even to throw out the least hint as to the nature of their contents.

Among the foremost to congratulate our heroine on her return, were her old friends, Mr. Giles Stubbles—or Squire Stubbles, as he was now called—and his lady, and they evinced the deepest interest and commiseration in her fate, assuring her of their friendship, offering her any assistance that she might require, and desiring her to make their hospitable mansion her home.

Phoebe felt this kindness gratefully, and warmly, and with tears, which she could not restrain, returned her thanks.

Our heroine might be said to be comparatively happy; there was but one great drawback on her peace of mind, and that was the mysterious disappearance of her unfortunate father, and the terrible fears which she entertained as to the fate which had befallen him, for every endeavour to discover what had become of him, had hitherto been unsuccessful, and there was consequently the greatest cause for the most serious apprehensions.

Then the anticipated departure of Henry, who expected every day a summons to his ship, caused her the most poignant anguish and regret, and she could not at times help giving way to the most dismal forebodings that they would never meet again. These thoughts, however, Henry and his sister tried to banish from her mind, and to excite the brightest hopes.

Thus passed away several days without anything particular occurring, and Phoebe became more calm and content. Accompanied by Amy and her brother, she had made frequent visits to the village, and those scenes of former happiness, so endeared to her from old associations and remembrances, and various were the thoughts, and powerful the emotions that were naturally kindled in her breast as she contemplated them; many were the tears she shed when she thought of the pleasures of the past, those pleasures which she had too much reason to fear were never more fated to return.

It should have been mentioned that one of Phoebe's first acts, after her becoming

settled in her new home, was to write to those kind and benevolent friends in London—Mr. and Mrs. Osborne—to whom she was so greatly indebted, and whom she could never cease to remember with feelings of the warmest esteem, giving them all the particulars of what had happened to her since they had parted in the giddy metropolis, and of her present situation and prospects. She also earnestly requested them to write to her, and expressed a sincere wish that the clouds of adversity that had so unfortunately darkened o'er them had passed away, and that they might now be restored to that happiness and prosperity they had formerly enjoyed, and which they so truly deserved.

Still poor old Mark Mayfield remained absent from his former dreary residence—which had again and again undergone a strict search—and no intelligence could be gained of him, so that the alarming fears that were entertained as to the fate which had too probably befallen him, were greatly increased; and it was not without much difficulty that Henry and his sister were enabled to impart the least hope or consolation to Phoebe upon the subject.

It was May-day morning, sweet, merry, smiling May, and never did the face of nature look more bright and cheerful in that happy season than on that occasion.

There was a holiday in the village, and our old friend Stubbles, with his characteristic hospitality was to give a feast to all who chose to come to it, and there was also to be a dance round the May-pole on the green lawn in front of his mansion. Phoebe and her friends received a special and most pressing invitation from the worthy squire and his lady, who hoped that the festivities on that joyous occasion might have a beneficial effect upon the spirits of the former, and serve, for a time, at any rate, to banish gloomy thoughts from her mind.

Our heroine, however, felt no inclination to mingle in a scene so little in unison with her present feelings and which could only recal painful remembrances of the past; and she would fain have been excused from accepting the invitation, but she yielded to the urgent request of Henry and Amy, and reluctantly agreed to be one of the party, although she could not hope to share in the general happiness which no doubt would there prevail.

And it was indeed a merry may-day among the villagers at the mansion of the squire, and on the lawn, on that occasion. Every one were left to enjoy themselves to their heart's content; ample fare of the best was provided for them, and the mirth and festivity were never allowed to relax for a minute, so that there seemed not to be a sad heart

among the throng, and even Phoebe, in spite of the melancholy thoughts that would at times occur to her, could not but participate in a great measure in the universal pleasure that prevailed.

How merrily they danced around the may-pole, and how they made the air resound with the shouts and laughter, and perhaps the happiest of all were Squire Stubbles and his simple, kind-hearted partner, who joined in the sports with their rustic friends, with the same alacrity, and hilarity that they had been accustomed to do when their circumstances were equally humble as those who were now their guests.

Evening approached, but still the mirth and revelry continued unabated, and the happy party seemed determined not to separate till a late hour. But the sports were somewhat interrupted by the appearance of the village postman, a person of considerable importance—in his own estimation—who had a letter for "Master Henry Ashford."

Henry took the letter with a faint heart and a trembling hand, for he too well foreboded from whence it came, and what were its contents, and Phoebe and Amy experienced the same feelings when they observed the melancholy expression which passed over his features as his eyes glanced at its contents. It was useless to keep them in suspense, or to conceal the fact from them, he therefore informed them at once, with a sigh, that it was the summons he had expected from the ship, and that he was commanded to be on board by the day after the next at the latest.

The anguish and regret of Phoebe and Amy at this confirmation of their fears, and the prospect of so soon being separated from Henry, with the uncertainty of when, if ever they should meet again, may be imagined, and our heroine could not restrain her feelings, but bursting into tears, she sunk on the bosom of him, who now that he was compelled so soon to leave her, seemed more precious to her than ever.

Henry himself felt so depressed, that he had but little power to offer her consolation, and with heavy hearts they left the merry party on the lawn, and slowly retraced their steps towards their home.

Here Phoebe gave free vent to her emotions, and no longer endeavoured to conceal the fervour of her love for Henry, and the consequent agony of her feelings at the thought of being separated from him.

"We must part, dear Phoebe," said Henry, as he pressed her to his throbbing bosom, and kissed away the tears that bedewed her cheeks, "for a time we must part, and heaven knows the deep regret I feel at the necessity which compels it at a time when I

am so anxious to be near you, and to watch over your welfare and happiness. But you know, Phoebe, that a true British seaman will never flinch from the duty he owes his country, even at the sacrifice of the other most paramount and dearest feelings and wishes of his heart; and will, therefore, I am satisfied, bear this unavoidable separation as becomes your womanly character, certain that your image will ever be most fondly enshrined in your faithful Harry's heart, that you will never be absent from his thoughts, and that even in the moments of the greatest danger, my prayers shall ever be offered up to the Supreme for the preservation of yourself and my dear sister Amy, and lead me on to hope. Courage, Phoebe, courage, trust in that sweet little cherub who sits up aloft, and will ever keep watch for the safety of the hardy mariner while tossed about on the angry billows, or exposed to the cannon balls of the enemies for that sea-girt isle, the proud land of his birth."

"Yes, dear Phoebe," observed Amy, "put but your trust in that All-merciful power my brother has invoked, and believe me you will have no cause to fear, all your most fervent hopes and wishes will be realised."

"I will endeavour to think so," sighed our heroine, "but still the thought of parting, so soon after our restoration to each other, and when I so greatly need the soothing voice, and manly protection of Henry, cannot but excite my deepest sorrow and regret, and when I think of the many dangers to which he will be exposed, the raging tempest, and the deadly strife, the battle and the breeze, I find it impossible to resist the dismal misgivings and apprehensions that beset my mind. Oh, Henry, I have now no other earthly hope but in you, and should you be taken from me—"

"Nay, my poor Phoebe," said the young mariner, still holding her in his affectionate embrace, "I pray you dismiss these gloomy thoughts from your mind, and once more I urge you to look on the brightest side of everything. I feel confident that our parting will not be for long, and that heaven will protect you and my sister from every harm which may threaten you during my absence. Besides you have warm friends near you, the good Mr. Stubbles and his kind-hearted wife, for instance, who will not fail to afford you every assistance and attention you may require, therefore you have nothing to fear. Cheer you then, my love, and look forward to the future with every hope and confidence."

"I will try to do so, dear Henry," she replied, smiling faintly through her tears, and fixing a look of the most ardent affection upon his handsome manly countenance,

"and believe me that when you are far away upon the dark blue waters of the ocean, he who once unfortunately, and to her own sorrow and regret, so cruelly deceived you, will ever remain faithful to those vows she has now so sincerely removed, and will never cease to offer up her prayers to heaven for your happiness, safety, and welfare."

"Bless you, bless you, Phoebe," said her lover rapturously, "for those dear words that are indelibly registered in the log-book of my memory, and will add courage to my heart, and give strength to my arm in the hour of danger. And rest assured that your Harry will ever remain as true to the dear girl of his heart, the mainstay, his sheet anchor, the bright haven of his joys, his hopes, his fondest wishes, as the needle to the pole. The wild tempest may disturb the elements in its greatest fury; the fierce battle may launch its deadliest wrath, but the one blessed thought that Phoebe's heart now throbs for me alone, will arm me against every fear and peril, and give me fortitude and strength to surmount every difficulty it may be my lot to have to encounter."

Phoebe seemed reanimated and encouraged by his observations, and she endeavoured to stifle her emotions, and to appear calm and resigned; in which she was assisted by Amy, who restrained the expression of her own feelings in her anxiety to impart consolation to her friend.

The following morning then was fixed for the departure of our hero, and after some time passed in similar conversation to that which has been described, they separated for the night.

But although, after having offered up a prayer to heaven, our heroine immediately retired to bed, it was in vain that for some time she could compose herself to sleep, so melancholy and distracting were the thoughts that disturbed her mind, and in spite of all that Henry and his sister had said, and her own efforts, now that she was alone, she again abandoned herself to the most violent grief and dismal forebodings, and in vain tried to feel the least degree of consolation. So dear was Henry Ashford now to her heart that she looked to a separation from him with the most unspeakable anguish, and as one of the greatest calamities that could befall her, and when she thought of the many dangers which the sailor has to encounter, and the uncertainty of his ever being permitted to return again to his native land, her heart sickened, and she anticipated the hour of parting with feelings of dread which she found it utterly impossible to control. She saw plainly that her troubles were not yet at an end, and she shrunk from the idea of those that might yet be in store for her

with fear and trembling, for she felt that she could no longer find strength to contend against them with that fortitude and resignation which had hitherto supported her throughout so many trials.

And then the continued absence of her afflicted parent, and the fearful misery that enveloped his fate, added to her anguish and anxiety, and racked her brain almost beyond endurance.

These torturing thoughts kept her waking for hours, until she was completely worn out, and when at length sleep did close her eyelids, it was but to experience a renewal of her anguish in painful and prophetic dreams, and she awoke in the morning but ill prepared to support the scene which was about to take place.

She hesitated for some time to leave her chamber, for now that the hour was at hand when the parting with her lover must take place, she could not but feel a sensation bordering upon dread to meet him, and all her endeavours to conquer the painful feeling was unavailing.

But before she could make up her mind to descend below, Amy, who had been up some time, making the necessary preparations for her brother's departure, entered the room, and by her gentle arguments and persuasions, sought to arouse her from the state of grief, if not of absolute despair, in which she found her, and to prepare her for the painful trial which could not be avoided, and urging upon her the anxiety of her brother to see her with as little delay as possible, as it was necessary that he should not defer his departure any longer than possible, as he had a considerable distance to travel, and the coach would be ready to depart in about an hour.

Unable to control the feeling that agitated her breast, Phoebe threw her fair arms around Amy's neck, and burst into tears, in which the latter suffered her to indulge for a few moments, in the hope that it might afford her some relief.

"Now, dear Phoebe," at length said Amy, in her gentlest and most affectionate accents, "pray struggle against these violent emotions, and endeavour to meet my poor brother on this most melancholy occasion with all the firmness and composure that you possibly can. Remember how it will add to his anguish if he sees you thus abandon yourself to despair."

"O, I cannot," sobbed Phoebe, in a voice almost inarticulate with grief; "I cannot control the violence of my grief, or dismiss the melancholy forebodings that haunt my mind and distract my brain. Oh, Henry, alas! why has cruel fate doomed us to be thus so soon torn asunder, and that, too, at the very time when your society is so pre-

cious to me, and I so much need your advice, your consolation, and protection?"

"This regret, however natural, my dear Phoebe," remarked Amy, "is useless, and can only serve to add to the pain of that parting which is unavoidable. You must be well aware that the grief I feel at the departure for an indefinite period of a fond brother, who is so dear to my heart, is equal to your own; but I know that it is his duty to his king and country calls him hence, and I flatter myself that I possess too patriotic a spirit not to submit to the necessity with becoming fortitude and resignation. Come, Phoebe, I know you will also exert yourself, and endeavour to meet this trial of the heart with firmness, and Providence, depend upon it, will not forsake him whom you love, but ere many months shall have elapsed, will once more safely restore him to us, to part no more; for, remember, this is to be his last voyage."

Phoebe again struggled with her emotions, more resolutely than she had done before, and at last succeeded in partly tranquillising them, and having dashed the tears from her eyes, with a trembling step and a throbbing heart, she accompanied Amy from the chamber.

Henry was waiting her appearance below with all the composure which, by a painful effort, he could assume, but still with all that inward anguish and painful anxiety which may be readily imagined. He never, in fact, felt so sad at heart on leaving England before; for he had now an additional claim upon his protection, and one which he could not but look upon with the same feeling as if she were actually already his wife. And then the painful situation in which he was compelled to leave her, increased his sorrow and regret. Had her father been discovered, and restored to reason, he could have effected a reconciliation between him and his unfortunate, but truly penitent daughter, he might have been more content; but as it was, he feared the result of continued anxiety in the mind and constitution of Phoebe, already so greatly impaired by long mental and physical suffering; and the dismal idea that ere he could again return to the shores of old England, she would probably have sunk under the terrible weight of sorrows and afflictions it had been her hard lot to endure, and might rest within the silent grave, tortured and distracted his brain, and almost unmanned him.

"Poor girl," he exclaimed, "may heaven in mercy protect you; give you yet further strength to support those heavy trials to which you are subjected, and avert those future evils which I cannot but apprehend. And oh, may I once more return to my

native land to find you restored to health and peace, if not to complete happiness—fond, cherished hope, too bright, too flattering, I fear, to be realised.”

He was interrupted in the midst of this soliloquy, by hearing the footsteps of his sister and Phoebe, as they descended the stairs; and, with a palpitating heart, but as much composure and firmness as he could summon to his aid at the moment, he prepared himself for the parting interview.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE SURPRISE.—THE SAILOR'S DEPARTURE.

There was a faltering outside the door, soft murmurings in the gentle voice of Amy, followed by deep sighs, and the young mariner could wait to hear no more, but rushing to the door, with an exclamation of unbounded affection, he caught the almost fainting Phoebe in his arms, and pressing the most ardent kisses upon her pale lips, he no longer sought to restrain the manly expression of his feelings.

Amy, much affected, stood by, with a most melancholy expression of countenance, and did not offered to interrupt the lovers, who continued locked in each other's embrace, and neither of them could for a few minutes give utterance to a word.

Poor Phoebe felt as if she could die in his arms rather than part, and her heart beat so violently against her side with the powerful and overwhelming emotions that agitated it, that it seemed to threaten to burst its tene-ment.

“Beloved Phoebe,” at length ejaculated Henry, in a voice rendered tremulous with emotion, notwithstanding all his efforts to suppress it; “beloved Phoebe, the hour of parting has arrived—that sad hour when, for a brief period, let us hope, we must bid each other adieu; but let us be firm, my dear girl, and bear the trial as become us. Come, I know my Phoebe will display the courage of a true Englishwoman, and never regret that her faithful tar is about to have the honour of being allowed to lend a helping hand in thrashing the foes of his country.”

“Oh, Henry,” sobbed forth our heroine, and gazing earnestly in the handsome countenance of the young seaman, as if she could never remove her eyes from him; “I really never knew the state of my heart—of my affection towards you, till now that I am about to lose you, and, alas! it may be for ever. Oh, why should the angry waves separate two hearts now so fondly united?”

“And can time, circumstance, or absence

from each other, think you, separate them, Phoebe?” said Henry; “No, it will but forge the fetters that bind them yet more strongly, and the happiness of again meeting will be enhanced by the blissful assurance that under every circumstance, through weal or woe, we have remained devotedly faithful to each other, and thus rendered ourselves deserving of that bright reward which heaven will no doubt bestow upon us. Bless you, then, my dearest Phoebe; may the almighty shower its choicest blessings upon your head, and that of my poor sister, and watch over and shield you both from every danger when I am far, far upon the sea.”

“No, no,” cried Phoebe, hysterically, and frantically clinging to his bosom—“You must not, shall not leave me, Harry. It would break my heart to part with you now, for you are my only hope, the only link which holds me to life itself, and who shall dare to separate us? Oh, Harry, now that you are so truly dear to me, you will not leave me!”

She fixed her eyes upon him with such a look of unutterable affection and agony, that it seemed to thrill through the very veins of the young mariner, and he could not repress a manly tear, which fell upon her cheek, as he covered her face with her parting kisses. But the clock warned him that it was time to depart, or the coach, by which he was to proceed on his journey, would have started without him, and, by a powerful effort, he mustered up all his resolution, and in a voice almost inarticulate, again invoked a blessing on her head, and uttered the melancholy word “farewell,” at the same time he gently tried to disengage himself from her.

But Phoebe still clung to him with convulsive agony, and sobbed as though her heart would break. She tried to speak, to call once more upon his name, but utterance was denied her, and with one long drawn sigh, which was sufficient to move the stoutest heart to pity, her eyes closed, and she sunk insensible on his bosom.

Again and again did Henry press his lips to her's, and strain her fair and delicate form to his heart, then in a voice half choked with the violence of his emotions, as he reluctantly withdrew himself from her embrace and resigned her to the care of his sister, he said—

“Take her Amy, and oh, I pray you use your utmost, your ever affectionate influence in soothing the violence of her anguish when I am far away and tossed upon the billows. Bless you, dear Amy—heaven bless you both; farewell, best of women and of sisters, till we meet again.”

With all the warmth of a brother's most tender feeling, he kissed and embraced Amy,

who, with a bursting heart had scarcely the power to respond to the word farewell, as, pressing his hand upon his forehead, he tore himself away from the cottage, and hurried towards the inn from which the coach was to start, his feelings worked up to a pitch of agonising excitement, which it is needless to attempt to describe.

He paused, and cast one lingering look back upon the cottage, and then, deeply sighing, he reluctantly proceeded on his way.

On arriving at the inn he was agreeably surprised to find Mr. and Mrs. Stubbles, Mr. Bristles, the beadle, and several of the villagers, waiting, as a mark of the respect in which they held him, having come to bid him farewell; and Mr. and Mrs. Stubbles, in their simple, honest way, deeply expressed their regret at the necessity which called him away, and their hearty good wishes for his welfare and his safe return to his native country.

"Good bye, Master Harry," said the worthy squire, warmly shaking his hand, "and I am sure there is nobody that wishes you better than I do, or can feel more for the sorrow of poor Phoebe Mayfield at parting with you. But if my friendship and assistance can be of any service to her and your sister while you are away, I'm sure I shall feel no greater pleasure than in bestowing them."

"Thank you, thank you, my excellent friend, for this kind promise," said Henry, which I know you will fulfill. And her unfortunate father, too; oh, I cannot but feel most painfully anxious for the fate of the poor old man. I pray you endeavour to discover him, and to see to his future safety and recovery from the unfortunate malady by which he is at present afflicted."

"Aye, that I will, Master Harry," replied the kind-hearted Mr. Stubbles; "poor old man; and should I be lucky enough to discover him, you may be sure that he shall not want a friend or a home, and it shall not be any fault of mine if I do not bring him and Phoebe together again."

Harry again heartily expressed his thanks, and the coach being ready to start, after bidding adieu to his rustic friends, he mounted on to the roof, with two or three of his shipmates, who were going by the same conveyance, the guard sounded his horn, and Henry Ashford was soon being hurried rapidly away towards the place of his destination.

Amy, after her brother had left the cottage, placed the insensible Phoebe in a chair, and, with a bosom swelling with anguish, hastened to the door, and with eyes streaming with tears, watched his retreating form, until it was hidden from her sight in the distance; and she then returned to the room, and gave free vent to her emotions.

It was several minutes after the departure of Henry ere Phoebe recovered to sensibility, and then her eyes wandering hastily and wildly round the room, she called affectionately upon his name, and it was not till then that she appeared to be conscious of his departure, and starting from her seat, in a voice of the greatest melancholy and anguish, she exclaimed.

"Gone, gone! oh, why has he abandoned me, now that he is so dear to me, and I feel that I cannot live without him? Oh, Henry, much loved youth, surely it is cruel thus to leave me in the midst of my loneliness and misery."

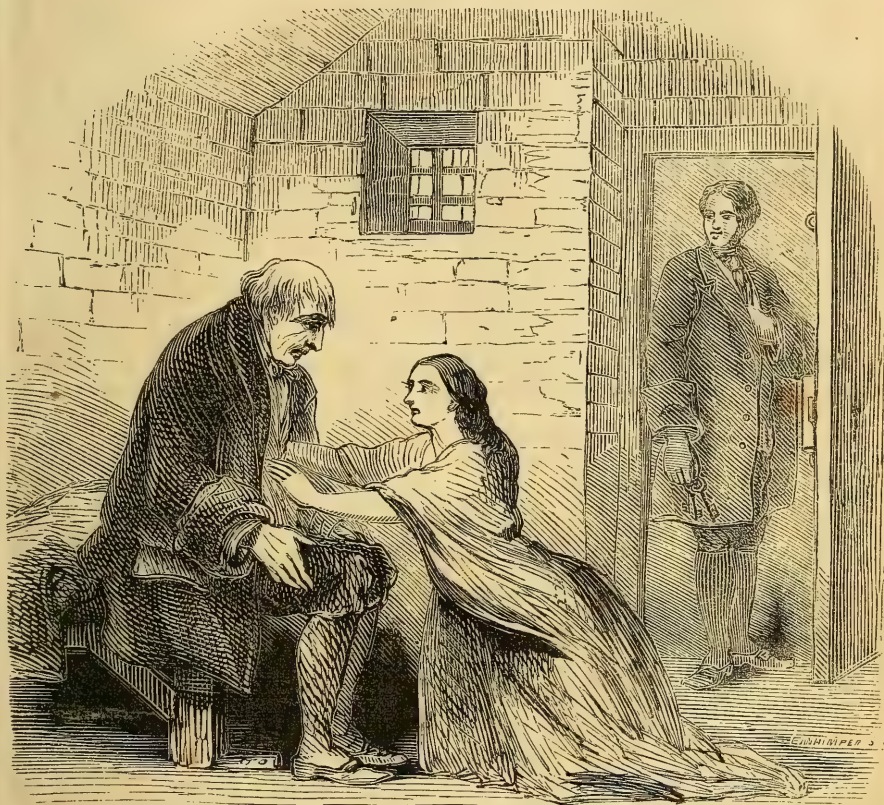
Amy gently approached her, and taking her hand, in a voice of the greatest affection and sympathy, said:

"Dear Phoebe, I pray you be calm, and not to agitate yourself unnecessarily thus. Regret is useless; and heaven knows the agony of my poor brother's feelings in being compelled to leave us. But it is the will of heaven, and we must learn to submit. Console yourself with the assurance that Harry's sentiments towards you must ever remain the same; that his thoughts will ever be fixed on you; his prayers for your welfare and happiness will constantly ascend to heaven, though distance shall separate you, and it may be long ere you meet again."

"Oh, heaven forbid that I should doubt his truth and constancy," replied our heroine, endeavoring to stifle the violence of her emotions in her breast; "No, I know his manly, faithful heart too well; but when I picture to myself the perils to which he will be exposed, my heart sickens, and a feeling of despair comes over me, which I find it utterly impossible to resist. Alas, why did I ever deceive him, and deviate from that path of rectitude I had so long pursued; our fates might long since have been united, and we should now have been happy in each other's love. But I have brought all my miseries upon myself, and that heaven is opposed to my union with one of whom I have proved myself to be utterly unworthy."

"Hold, Phoebe," said her companion, with a look of gentle remonstrance; "I cannot patiently listen to you while you talk thus. Why will you persist in so bitterly and unjustly reproaching yourself?"

"Oh, have I not more than sufficient cause to do so?" said Phoebe, with a sigh, and the tears still chasing each other down her pale cheeks. "Have I not been most guilty? Yes, it is useless for me to attempt to deny it, or to extenuate my conduct. It is by trials severe and insupportable as this that I am punished. There is no hope of happiness again for me—alas, none! My poor father is lost to me for ever; and now, to



fill up the measure of my grief, he to whom my heart is now so firmly, so fondly devoted, and without whose beloved presence all is destitute and drear, is torn from me, never, never I fear to return. I am a miserable wretch, deserted, friendless."

"Nay," said Amy, with a look of gentle reproach, "this is unkind, Phoebe, most ungenerous. Can you be the friendless, lonely, deserted being you represent yourself while Amy Ashford at least regards you with a sister's love, and would do anything to serve you, would make any sacrifice to promote your happiness? I had thought that I merited a better opinion from you than this."

"Oh, pardon me, dear Amy," said our heroine, affectionately embracing her gentle and amiable friend and companion, "pardon

me if I appear ungrateful, unmindful of the affectionate attentions you have paid me, so much more than I merit, for my brain is so bewildered by this sad parting that I know not what I say. Oh, can I ever forget your manifold services, your unremitting kindness to me, when all the world seemed to despise me, and left me to perish from want and misery, and I was a wretched wanderer, without a roof 'neath which to shelter my head, one sympathising voice to soothe my anguish, to commiserate my sufferings, or to lead me on to hope? Can I forget that you are the sister of him who was my warmest, purest love, and who has ever been his best and most devoted friend in the hours of adversity? No, I must indeed be a wretch totally unworthy of anything but disgust of scorn, and hatred, could I do so.

Forgive me, Amy, oh, forgive me for the words I uttered."

Amy pressed the poor girl to her bosom, and their tears for some time mingled together.

But at length after much exertion, Amy did succeed in somewhat soothing the violence of her grief, and she became comparatively composed and resigned, or at least, in order to satisfy Amy, she affected to be so.

The day passed gloomily away, but ere it had expired, Phoebe had formed a wild and singular resolution, in which, Amy finding it impossible to dissuade her from it, reluctantly joined her, and the following morning, at an early hour, the two friends hastily quitted the cottage—which they left in charge of one of the servants of Mr. Stubbles, to whom they had despatched a note on the previous evening—and made their way towards the inn from which Henry had departed on his journey.

This strange conduct will be fully explained anon. We will now return to the young mariner, Henry Ashford.

Sad indeed was his heart as the coach rapidly proceeded on its way, and from this depression of spirits his shipmates in vain endeavoured to arouse him. His sister and Phoebe were never absent from his thoughts for a minute, he treasured every word they had uttered at parting in his memory, with the most fervent affection, and he could not divest his mind of the fears and misgivings that beset it. Again he regretted the fate which separated him from them at the very time when they so much needed his protection, and he pictured to himself in the most dismal colours the anguish they would endure, and the misfortunes that might befall them during the time he was away.

And then what might be his own fate? Exposed to all the perils of the deep, and the horrors and dangers of the battle, he might never more be destined to return to his native land, and should he not be restored to them, what would become of the poor girls, left alone and unprotected as they would then be in the world? The thought agonised him, and it was in vain that he endeavoured to dismiss it from his mind.

It was true that the worthy Mr. Stubbles and his kind-hearted wife had promised to befriend his sister and Phoebe during his absence, and he had no doubt that they would keep their word, but should anything happen to him, who, or what could replace his loss to them? What consolation could they hope to receive?

His shipmates guessed the cause of his melancholy—for when on board there was not one more merry than "trim Harry," as he was familiarly called—and they good

humouredly rallied him upon it. But Henry was in no humour to bear with their jokes, and finding that it pained and annoyed him, they desisted, and tried other means to arouse him, but all with little or no success, and they ultimately left him to his own gloomy thoughts and meditations.

The coach had soon left all those scenes so fondly endeared to the young mariner, and which he might never behold again, far behind, and his spirits became, if possible, even more depressed.

They had now entered upon a gloomy part of the road, overshadowed on either side by the wide spreading and thickly interwoven branches of tall trees, which almost excluded the light of day, when Henry and his companions were somewhat startled by hearing a strange wild laugh, followed by boisterous shouts and exclamations, and no sooner were Henry's eyes directed towards the place from whence the disturbance arose, than he beheld the figure of a man glide, ghost-like, across the road, and stand for a moment, apparently to watch the coach pass. Henry needed no second glance to convince him that it was the unfortunate Mark Mayfield, and his excitement on beholding him, and especially under circumstances that prevented his having an opportunity of speaking to him—for before he could request the driver to stop for an instant, the coach had passed him—may be imagined.

The poor old man, who looked the very picture of madness and misery, laughed wildly and clapped his hands, as the vehicle flew past him, and Henry looking anxiously back, beheld him make his way hastily between the trees, and suddenly disappear, but his mad laughter could be heard, even when the coach had proceeded a considerable distance from the spot where he had been seen.

This event added to the anguish and excitement of Henry's feelings, notwithstanding it afforded him much satisfaction to find that the poor old man was still alive, for he saw that his madness had increased rather than abated, and he could well imagine what would be the agony of his daughter, should she by accident encounter him in such a deplorable condition.

"A strange craft that," remarked one of the sailors, "he seems to have slipped his cable, broke from his moorings, and escaped from some mad-house."

Henry made no reply to these observations, for he wished not to discuss the melancholy subject with those who could feel so little interest in it, and he again relapsed into that dismal train of thought, which this circumstance naturally served to increase.

It would be tedious, however, to follow

our hero through all the particulars of his journey, nothing more of any importance or worthy of recording occurring to him, and in due time he arrived at the harbour in which the ship to which he belonged, and which was called "The Invulnerable," was at present lying.

After having partaken of some refreshment with his shipmates at The Rear Admiral, Harry went on board, with a sadder heart than he had ever done before, and in the performance of such duties as devolved upon him, he in vain tried to divert his thoughts from the melancholy subjects that engrossed them.

As he cast his eyes across the ocean, and thought how soon its broad waters would separate him, and perhaps for ever, from all he most loved and cherished upon earth, he looked forward to the time for sailing with a feeling of dread which he found it impossible to conquer, and he never felt so great a repugnance for a nautical life before; his ardent spirit was completely daunted, and he could not but feel ashamed at his weakness although he was unable to overcome it.

The vessel, he learnt, had not received orders for sailing until the day after the following—when her course would be across the wide Atlantic—and he therefore obtained permission to pass the interval on shore, where he thought he could better collect his thoughts and recruit his spirits than on board ship. His first thought was to address a parting letter to Phoebe and his sister, in which he could more calmly and fully express his thoughts and feelings and better endeavour to impart consolation to them, than he had been able personally to do on leaving them, and having done this he felt somewhat more tranquil and reassured.

"The Rear Admiral," whose jovial host was a veteran seamen, "laid up in port,"—was a right nautical tavern, affording every accommodation for its guests, excellent cheer, and everything that chat could add to their comfort and good humour; and during the time that the different vessels were in the harbour, it had no lack of customers, who kept up a continual round of mirth, singing, dancing, and carousing from morning till night, and Henry, in spite of the melancholy thoughts that continually harassed and tormented him, could not but sometimes participate in their gaiety, although it was at a great sacrifice of his feelings that he did so; and he more often avoided the tavern, and wandered about so that he might give uninterrupted indulgence to his meditations.

At length the day for the departure of the vessel arrived, and although much mirth prevailed on shore with the hardy mariners, there were many weeping eyes and aching

hearts among their wives and sweethearts at the thought of parting from those they loved, with the painful uncertainty as to whether they might meet again.

It was a bright cheerful morning, and every way calculated to exhilarate the spirits, and there were many among the gallant crew of the Invulnerable, assembled at the old hostelry, upon whom it had that happy influence. Some were seated at the tables outside the house with their fair lasses, all smiles and tears alternately, engaged in loving chat; some were singing in tones hearty and boisterous enough, if not very musical; and others were dancing merrily to the music of an old blind fiddler, a veteran pensioner, who plied his bow with a dexterity and indefatigable industry that afforded the highest satisfaction to all. And the sun shone brightly on the rippling waters, so calm and beautiful, and the white sails of the stately Invulnerable, and the other noble ships which at that time were lying at anchor in the harbour.

Henry for some time sat apart from his shipmates, at a little table, gazing listlessly at their festivities, but he was not permitted to remain so, for two of the sailors, with whom he had ever been on the most friendly and intimate terms, approached him, and quickly aroused him from his meditations.

"Why, Henry, my young sea-lion," observed one of these, a true specimen of a British tar, who went by the name of Ben Boose on board the ship. "You have parted company with your messmates, and look as dull as a tur on four-water grog, or when placed in the bilboes. Come, my lad, cast care adrift, blue jackets must never yield to the blue devils; the time will soon arrive when we shall have to go aboard, so, splice the main-brace, my hearty, and then join us in the dance, for we know that there is not a seaman in his most gracious majesty's navy, who can better shake a toe than Henry Ashford."

Our hero knew it was useless to refuse, although his feelings were so strongly opposed to it, so he conquered his emotions as well as he could, and taking a hasty drink of grog, of which there was such an abundant supply, he was reluctantly about to comply with the other part of the request, when the mail-guard's horn was heard, and the coach was seen coming along the road which led to the harbour, at the same time most of the guests suddenly retired into the house, or away from the immediate spot where they had been holding their revelry, and our hero found himself, much to his satisfaction, standing alone, and watching the approaching coach, which he did most anxiously, though he was at a loss to know for why.

He could not account for the strange feel-

ings that agitated him at the sight of the coach, but his heart beat violently, and he felt as if something particular was about to happen to him.

The coach stopped at the door of the old tavern, and the passengers dismounted from the roof, and others from the inside of the vehicle, and our hero watched them each eagerly as they alighted.

There was a loud exclamation, and immediately afterwards two female forms alighted from the coach, and rushed towards the spot on which Henry was standing, calling upon his name.

Could he believe the evidence of his senses, or was he labouring under some wild and singular delusion of the moment? No, the throbbing hearts that were soon so fondly pressed to his; the sweet and gentle voices that called so affectionately on his name; the tears that fell upon his cheeks, quickly convinced him he was not; with feelings of unbounded amazement and melancholy delight the young seaman once more held in his ardent embrace, his sister, and his beloved Phoebe.

Yes, that was the strange resolution which poor Phoebe had formed on the day when Henry had departed from the cottage, and from which Amy had in vain tried to dissuade her, wild, useless, and extravagant as it was, and had therefore consented to accompany her, and, as will be seen, they had only just arrived in time to see him once more ere the vessel set sail from England.

To attempt to describe in any language, however, eloquent it might be, the scene which followed this unexpected meeting, would indeed be a difficult and even fruitless task, and for some minutes the emotions of each were so violent that they could not find power or words in which to express them; and the young sailor could only continue to strain them both to his bosom, and to mentally invoke blessings on their heads.

Wishing to avoid the observation of those about, he drew them both into the house, beckoning to the landlord to show them into a private room, and when there, they all gave more free vent to the extraordinary and powerful feelings that agitated their breasts than they had done before, and Phoebe was for some minutes convulsed with sobs and sighs that were sufficient to move even the most insensible heart to pity to hear them.

"Sister, Phoebe," at last ejaculated Henry, "how can I express my astonishment I will not say regret, although that must be the feeling which predominates over every other, at your exposing yourself to this useless repetition of anguish, after our parting at home? Oh, why had you not endeavoured to reconcile yourselves to that melancholy

event which there were no means of averting? Why undertake a journey so wild and extravagant, and which can answer no purpose, but to add to the sorrow of us all? Pardon me, if I say that such a step is little short of madness. In a few minutes the signal gun will have sounded for all to be on board, and yon noble vessel, will weigh anchor, and bear me far away; could not then the idea of it have satisfied you, without thus to put yourselves to extra and unavailing grief in realising it, certain the last words on your faithful Harry's lips, on leaving the shores of his native land, would have been uttered in invoking a blessing on your heads, a prayer for your future welfare? Oh, it is folly, it is very imprudent."

"Oh, Harry," said our heroine, in a voice half choked with sobs, and almost blinded by her tears, "you may blame me for this wild and perhaps imprudent step, but my heart so clings to you in this torturing hour, and such fearful forebodings distract my brain, that I could not, even though my life had to pay for it, resist the temptation, the feeling which urged me to it. I view this parting, and in spite of all my efforts to subdue it, with a feeling amounting to horror, for something tells me 'tis for ever. Harry, dear Harry, you must not, shall not leave me. My heart will break."

"Poor girl, poor girl," sighed our hero, as he once more strained her to his heart, and looked in her pale but lovely countenance with an expression of unutterable agony and regret; "this wild paroxysm of grief and despair unmans me. And you, Amy, oh, why did you yield to her persuasions, instead of preventing, by the power of your persuasions, and the gentle influence of your soothing voice, this needless addition to her anguish?"

"Alas, my dear, brother," replied Amy; "that I should thus incur your reproaches, when heaven knows that I am not to blame, and that how ardently I exerted myself to dissuade poor Phoebe from so rash and imprudent a step; but when I found that all my arguments were useless, and that she was determined, think you that I could suffer her to come alone? No, I could not; and although you may continue to blame me for that over which I had no control, I have acted for the best—indeed I have."

"Pardon me, Amy," said Henry, "if my rash tongue has given utterance to words of reproach towards you, which my heart dictates not; but this unexpected meeting, at a moment when I am so little prepared for it, bewilders, tortures, and distracts me. Oh, Phoebe, most beloved of all earthly beings, in what language shall I find power to express my feelings towards you in this cruel

hour of trial? Leave me, I beseech you, leave me, for it breaks my heart to gaze upon you—to view your agony and despair, and to know that I have not the power to soothe and to relieve it.”

“Leave you, Henry,” replied the poor girl, sobbing as though her heart would break, and clinging more firmly to him; “oh, I cannot, and who shall dare to separate those who are bound together by every sacred and solemn vow? Are you not mine—my affianced husband, all, everything to me? and why should you be remorselessly torn from me, and to leave me in misery, loneliness, and despair? If you must go, oh, why will they not suffer me to accompany you; to be constantly by your side—to share with you in all your dangers, and, if heaven so wills it, to lay down my life in—”

“Phoebe,” interrupted her greatly agitated lover, “this is madness; you know not what you say, or surely you would not talk thus wildly. For heaven’s sake awaken to reason and be calm. Do you wish to unman me in the presence of my shipmates? Do you doubt the sincerity of the vows I have so fervently pledged to you, and think that time or absence can ever alter the sentiments that now glow in my breast towards you? No, I am certain you cannot; and that thought, that assurance ought to satisfy you, and to reconcile you to that melancholy parting which, alas, is inevitable.”

At that moment the loud report of a gun boomed across the ocean, and at the sound the young mariner started, and evinced the greatest emotion, and Phoebe trembled violently, and turned more ghastly pale than before.

“Ah,” she exclaimed, in a voice that spoke the fear and agony of her feelings, “what means that warning sound? Speak, Henry, I implore you speak.”

“It is the signal from the ship to go on board,” replied her lover; “in a few minutes the anchor will be weighed, and the proud vessel will stretch her swelling canvass to the breeze. The moment has arrived, farewell old England, farewell friends, home, sweethearts, wives; stern duty gives the word of command; and the poor mariner, whatever be the fate in store for him, must obey. Farewell, Phoebe, farewell best of sisters; oh, watch over and comfort and protect that beloved being so sacred to your brother’s heart. Nay, Phoebe, for the love of heaven cling not so frantically to me, nor continue to gaze upon me thus.”

He tried to disengage himself from her, but could not, and so violent was the paroxysm of her grief, that madness for the time seemed to have seized upon her brain.

The sailors had now hastened from the

house, and were preparing hastily to go on board; all was bustle, confusion, and activity, and Henry, at length, with a powerful effort, and an indescribable burst of emotion, tore himself away from the embrace of Phoebe and his sister, and hastened to join his shipmates, Phoebe and Amy distractedly following; but when they issued from the house, our hero was already in one of the boats that were putting off from the shore to the ship, and he waved his handkerchief in the air as the boat proceeded on its way with a look of melancholy and regret, which it would be impossible to forget.

Phoebe uttered not a word, not a sound, but she stood with clasped hands and straining eyes as if rivetted, petrified to the spot, bound up in agony and despair, and watched the boat until it reached the vessel, and all went on board. A few minutes of the most torturing suspense succeeded. Then there was a deafening shout came across the water from the ship, which was answered by a loud cheer from the numerous persons on shore, and the guns of the different vessels in the harbour, the Invulnerable weighed anchor, and sailed majestically on her course; and Phoebe, with a cry so plaintive and so piteous, that it moved the hearts of all who heard it, sunk senseless in the arms of her fair companion.

CHAPTER XLVII.

MARK MAYFIELD, THE LUNATIC.—AN AFFECTING SCENE.

During this time what had become of the wretched Mark Mayfield, previous to the day when Henry saw him from the coach?

He had wandered to different parts of the country, in the dreariest and wildest of places, living on wild fruits, or such trifles as he could obtain from charity, resisting effectually every effort to detain him, and sleeping at night, when quite exhausted, in any wretched hovel or outhouse he might happen to meet with. His reason was quite gone; not a spark remained, and he seemed totally unconscious of his actions, of the past and present, and of everything around him.

It was a lamentable spectacle, and he could scarcely help exciting the deepest commiseration of all who saw him. It would have been a mercy could he have been secured, and conveyed to some asylum, for it was not likely that he could long continue this wandering wretched life, without something fatal happening to him.

A storm had been raging violently the whole of the day following that on which our

hero had seen the poor old man, and as night set in it increased in fury instead of abating. It was fearfully dark, except when at intervals the lightning darted across the sky, wind and thunder emulated each other in their wrath, and the rain descended in such overwhelming torrents that it seemed scarcely possible for anything human to stand up against it.

And in that fearful hour, with his clothes hanging in tatters around his emaciated form, exposing his bare flesh to the inclemency of the weather, and his white hair hanging wet and dishevelled about his neck and shoulders, poor old Mark Mayfield was wandering shelterless, cold, and famishing in one of the most lonely and wretched parts of the country. For many, many weary hours he had been thus exposed, and without food or rest, for he had avoided every place where he was likely to obtain them, and had scarcely encountered a human being or habitation during the day. And now he stood and gazed vacantly and wildly around him, and as the thunder roared and the lightning fiercely flashed, he laughed aloud, as if in derision and defiance of their wrath.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed; "how the angry elements roar, and howl, and grumble. They do it to frighten me, I know; but it be the music that delights me, and I can laugh and sing and be merry in the midst of it, as in those happy days when all wur summer and sunshine. Yes, yes, I be merry, vary merry, ha, ha ha!"

And again the wretched maniac rent the air with his wild and fearful laughter, and shook his fist as the lightning blazed around his head.

He endeavoured to walk forward a few paces, but his weary and exhausted limbs could support him no longer, and he sunk upon the earth insensible.

He had not remained so long, when some villagers, on their return home from labour, happened to pass that way, and one of them, who was a little in advance of his companions, approaching near the spot where the wretched man was lying couched down, and perfectly unconscious, stumbled against him, and the next moment a broad glare of lightning, which illumined the whole place for an instant, revealed his form to him, and calling to his companion, he said:

"Here be some poor man, who be either dead or insensible, though I should rather think the former, lying here as he is in such a dreadful storm as this. Mayhap he may be struck wi' th' lightning, poor creature. Bring forward that lantern you carry, Robin, and then we can examine him more narrowly."

Robin did as he was desired, followed by

his mates, and stooping down they examined the unfortunate object of their solicitude minutely, and his miserable and squalid appearance excited their deepest pity.

"Poor old man," said the person who had first discovered him; "how bad he looks, and what he must have suffered, from his appearance. I'm sure it be enough to make one's heart bleed wi' compassion. But he bean't dead (though I should think he be dying), for I can feel his heart beat, and he breathes faintly. Assist me to raise him; we must not leave him here to perish, and I think the best thing we can do is to convey him to the parish workhouse, which is the likeliest place where he can meet with the proper assistance his deplorable case requires."

To this the other rustics agreed, and they then raised Mark from the earth, and in doing so it aroused him from the state of insensibility he had been in, and glancing vacantly upon the persons who supported him, he burst into an idiotic laugh, which it seemed almost impossible for him to have strength to do in his exhausted condition, and which made the place resound again.

"Poor old man," said one of the villagers, in a tone of pity, "long and severe suffering seems to have turned his brain; he is certainly mad."

"Mad!" repeated Mark, hastily, and fixing his eyes wildly upon the face of the speaker; "ha, ha, ha, fool! I am not mad; what have I, a happy, prosperous old man like me, wi' a worthy o'd dame, and a pretty, good, and innocent daughter, to make me mad? I am not mad, I tell ye; no, no, no! I be only merry at the wrath of the raging tempest, which seeks in vain to frighten me by its hoarse voice, that speaks in the wind and the thunder, and shakes the old forest trees. Hark! do you not hear it? Is it not pretty music? It is the elements that be mad and not I! ha, ha, ha!"

The villagers looked at each other and shook their heads, but for a minute or two hesitated what to do, while Mark continued to laugh and shout alternately, as if in mockery of the storm. But his limbs trembled, and he was evidently in that deplorable state that, without immediate relief and the greatest care and attention, must terminate in the most fatal consequences.

"Why do you stare at me like so many idiots?" he said, after a pause, "do ye not see that I be a man, an' a wealthy, happy o'd man, too? I ha' nothing to make me miserable. And yet," he continued, with a more serious look, and a sigh escaped his lips, "listen, and I will tell ye, though it be all false, false, and you must not believe it. They said that my pretty innocent bairn wur

false to th' poor o'd feyther and mither, who loved her so fondly. They said that she deserted them, left the happy home of her childhood, all to throw herself away upon a noble libertine. They said that she had become fallen, abandoned, lost, and degraded. But they lied, my child could sooner have perished than have been guilty of a single act which might raise a blush of shame upon her poor o'd parents cheeks, or cause their hearts a single pang. You do not believe that she could;—tell me, eh?"

"No, no," said one of the men, kindly, and thinking to humour him, "we knew it was a mere idle, wicked tale, got up by the malice of scandal and jealousy. But come, my good old friend, you are wet and cold, and need shelter, rest, and refreshment. We will conduct you where you can obtain them."

"Away!" said the old man, passionately, and trying to release himself from the hold of those who supported him, "you mock me, and would lead me astray, and from my present happy life. Begone, I say, I will ha' no more to do wi' ye. Ah! do ye despise my commands?—Do ye seek to detain me?—Off!—villains!—wretches, hypocrites, off, I say!"

He again struggled to release himself, at the same time raving wildly, but his strength was entirely exhausted, and, after a few feeble and useless efforts, he sunk into the arms of those who held him, again senseless and inanimate.

"Unfortunate man," said one of the rustics, "he be in the last stage of madness, sure enough; but there is not a moment to be lost, and it is folly in us to tarry here in such a storm. Let us, while he is in a state of insensibility, convey him at once to the workhouse, where he will be taken proper care off."

Raising Mark upon their shoulders, they then proceeded as fast as they could with their senseless burthen, from the spot, towards the parish workhouse, which was situated about half a mile distant, at the entrance to a village, and where they shortly arrived, and before Mark in the slightest degree, showed any signs of recovery.

Here the wretched old man was immediately admitted, and the villagers having stated the circumstances under which they had found him, and received the thanks of the master of the workhouse, who was a kind-hearted man, for their humanity, and the trouble they had taken, departed to their homes.

Mark, who still remained insensible, and seemed to be dying, had every attention paid him that his deplorable case required, and which humanity could suggest, although it was quite unknown to every one, the

workhouse being situated some miles from the village of Dewsbury.

He was immediately undressed, and placed in a warm bed, the parish doctor, who possessed more zeal than skill in his profession, and the nurse were promptly in attendance, to see his necessities, and there was nothing wanting, or left undone that might tend to his recovery; but such were the sad effects that long suffering, privation, and exposure to the weather had taken upon him, that it was some time ere their praiseworthy efforts were rewarded with any successful results, and when they were, such was his excited state from the effects of the unfortunate malady under which he laboured, that from his wild ravings it was impossible to gather any clue to his identity, and they had the greatest difficulty in administering those restoratives which were absolutely necessary.

At length exhausted, he became more composed, seemed to have some faint and vague idea of the kindness with which he was being treated, and to feel grateful for it, and after a time, he gradually sank into a sound sleep, in which he continued, almost undisturbed, till the morning.

Strict search was made among his clothes, but nothing was found that could lead to a discovery as to who he was, and in his disordered state of mind, to put any questions to him upon the subject, would have been perfectly useless.

The following day it was quite evident that poor old Mark Mayfield's case was a hopeless one, and one beyond the skill of the parish doctor to deal with, and prompt measures were taken to place him in a lunatic asylum, to which he was removed without delay, and was there immediately recognised, and information forwarded to the village of Dewsbury, for such of his friends who might be anxious to know what had become of him, or who felt any interest in his fate.

This was before Phoebe and Amy had returned home, after their useless journey; but the melancholy situation of the unfortunate old man excited the deepest feelings of sympathy among the inhabitants of the village, and in none more so than Mr. Stubbles and his wife, the former resolving at once to visit him in the asylum, and to see that everything that his case required should be done for him, he being resolved to pay every expense.

But on his arrival at the asylum, Mr. Stubbles was informed that his madness had received so determined and violent a form that it was found necessary to place him under the greatest restraint, and that it was not advisable for any one to see him, till he became more calm, except the officers connected with the establishment, and those

who had him immediately under their treatment.

Thus Mr. Stubbles was disappointed, and awaited with some anxiety the return of Phoebe and her amiable friend.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE LUNATIC.—MORE SORROW FOR PHOEBE.

Unable to support the fainting Phoebe, in consequence of her own powerful emotions, Amy solicited the assistance of one or two of the sailors's wives, who had just parted from their husbands, and the poor girl was immediately conveyed once more into the little room in the tavern where the parting interview with Henry Ashford had taken place, and the hostess was quickly in attendance to render her aid towards her recovery.

"Ah, poor thing," said the old woman, "it is very hard for her, and I don't wonder at her taking on so; I remember when I and my old man, bless his heart, was a sweet-hearting, some forty years ago, it used to cause me the same grief, I never failed to ship a heavy sea of trouble on the morning when we had to part. It's quite nat'ral you know, miss, ain't it?"

Amy smiled, and replied in the affirmative.

"Harry Ashford is a good young man," continued the hostess, "and as brave a seaman, so all his shipmates say, as there is in his Majesty's navy. You're his sister, miss, I take it, from the likeness, and this poor girl is Harry's mate, as is to be?"

Amy again smiled, and replied in the affirmative, but anxious for the recovery of Phoebe, she reminded the old woman that it was necessary to see to that without delay, and the latter lost no time in exerting herself to effect that object which was quickly accomplished by the means of proper restoratives, and our heroine revived.

She called upon the name of her lover, but finding that he was not present, the whole truth flashed upon her memory, and throwing herself into the arms of Amy, she burst into a violent paroxysm of sobs and tears to which she was prudently allowed to give free vent,

But at length by the aid of Amy and the hostess, she became somewhat more calm, but lamented the cruel fate which had separated her from her lover in the most piteous terms.

"He will never return," she sighed, the tears still streaming down her cheeks, "I feel a dismal and unconquerable foreboding that he will not. Oh, Harry, I could willingly have laid my life down for you. Why

was I not permitted to accompany you? To have been near you, would have been heavenly bliss, and no dangers to which I might then have been exposed, could have presented any terrors to me, however appalling they might have been."

"What folly it is to talk thus, dear Phoebe," remonstrated Amy, "and how fruitless are all those complaints and lamentations. Banish them from your mind, and endeavour to view this melancholy event with firmness and composure."

"Aye, my poor lass," said the hostess, "so as your young friend advises you, and all will be well, take my word for it. You will see your faithful sailor lad again, never fear, and he will return with lots of prize money, a full cargo of love, and you will get spliced and happy in no time at all. Come, come, as my old commodore would say, send care to old davy; steer clear of the rocks and shoals of sorrow, and then there will be no fear of your ever foundering in the sea of despair."

In spite of her melancholy, Phoebe could not help smiling at the honest good humour of the simple hostess, and drying her tears she did endeavour to ameliorate the violence of her grief.

"But you have had a long journey, young lasses," said the landlady, "and you require refreshment and rest. You will probably do me the honour of remaining here to-day and to-night, if you have no where better to go, for the coach will not be here till the morning. You may depend upon having every comfort and accommodation."

Amy and Phoebe returned their thanks, and gladly accepted the landlady's invitation, for it would have been folly to have proceeded on their return home—especially after the excitement they had undergone—until they had rested, and endeavoured in some measure to regain their composure.

So the hostess showed them into another room above, apart from the other guests, and then bustled about with a right good will to procure them the refreshment they necessarily required.

The room they were now in was clean and comfortable, and what rendered it more agreeable to Phoebe and her companion was, that from the windows was commanded an uninterrupted and extensive marine view, which the golden beams of the meridian sun, now reflected upon in glittering splendour.

With what feelings of deep interest and emotion did the young friends watch the different vessels as they glided over the ocean, until they faded away on the distant horizon.

They pictured to themselves the distance which the Invulnerable had by this time



proceeded on her voyage—for two or three hours had now elapsed since she set sail—and what were the thoughts of Harry at that moment, and they both fervently invoked the blessing and protection of heaven for him; whilst Phoebe gradually became more composed and resigned, and endeavoured to look forward to the future with hope and confidence.

Amy was glad to see this favourable change and encouraged her in it, and thus the time after the departure of Harry passed away much more tranquilly than could have been expected.

The old tavern had a goodly supply of guests during the day, sailors from the different ships in the harbour, and their wives and sweethearts; and the day being remarkably fine, they enjoyed themselves

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according to their various inclinations, outside the house; and Amy and Phoebe had an opportunity of amusing themselves by watching their various sports and pastimes, without being intruded on themselves; and which served to divert their thoughts for some time.

But as evening advanced the sky became overcast, the wind arose, and everything betokened an approaching storm. The spirits of the young friends became depressed, and gloomy thoughts and apprehensions again beset their minds.

These fears were by no means dispelled by the observations of the hostess who prophesied a rough night, and expressed many anxious wishes for the safety and preservation of the hardy mariners, who were exposed to every danger on the deep.

The sailors took leave of their female companions, and hastened to return to their different ships where their services might be required, and silence soon reigned in the Rear Admiral.

The threatened storm came at last; the wind continued to increase till it blew a perfect hurricane, and the waves swelled and rolled fearfully, lashing the shore, and breaking the different boats from their moorings. The black and ponderous clouds that had long obscured the horizon burst, and discharged a perfect deluge of rain, the thunder reverberated above, and repeated flashes of vivid lightning completed the horrors of the scene.

Phoebe and Amy continued to sit near the window, and to watch with anxious eyes the raging tempest, which soon was at its height, and the anguish of their feelings as they did so, need not be described. Already was Henry exposed to those dangers which they apprehended, and this storm, so soon after the sailing of the vessel seemed to be a dismal augury of the future, and their hearts—particularly that of Phoebe—sunk, and again the most gloomy forebodings haunted and tortured their minds.

Every minute the storm increased in violence, and there seemed no prospect of its subsiding or abating for some time to come, and the agitation of Phoebe and Amy increased with the fury of the tempest.

Night had set in before they could be persuaded to leave the window, and to retire to their chamber, and when they did so it was not with the idea of obtaining any rest, for that was impossible with the present thoughts and feelings occupying and distracting their minds.

They knelt down together, and solemnly and earnestly implored the protection of heaven for Henry, and in this attitude, and thus occupied, they continued for some time, in vain endeavouring to tranquillise their feelings.

At length they sought their bed, but the loud voice of the tempest kept them waking, and thus it continued during the whole of the night. But as morning approached it gradually abated, and at length ceased altogether. The wind went down, the thunder ceased to roar, the lightning no longer darted its forked fury, the black and ponderous clouds dispersed, the sun slowly arose, and a calm succeeded the fearful storm that had for so many hours raged so terrifically, presenting a glad contrast, which afforded the greatest relief to many anxious minds.

Phoebe and her fair companion felt their spirits greatly revive, and they again returned their thanks to that Almighty Power, whom they trusted had graciously watched

over and mercifully protected that beloved being who enlisted all their warmest sympathies.

"Yes," said Amy, "we must put our trust in providence, my dear Phoebe, and believe that it has protected, throughout this awful night, and will continue to shield from every danger my poor brother. Come, dearest sister, for as such indeed I may claim you, we will be firm, meet present sorrows with the fortitude which becomes us, and fear not but we shall meet with the reward which our most sanguine hopes can anticipate.

"I will try to think so, Amy," answered our heroine, "and in that fond anticipation endeavour to find some gleam of sunshine in the gloom which at present surrounds my destiny. Dear Harry, may heaven sustain you through all the difficulties and vicissitudes that you may have yet to encounter in your perilous career, and restore you safe to those whose whole affections are so ardently devoted to you, and on whom your heart's warmest and most holy love is equally enthusiastically and passionately bestowed.

The entrance of the hostess to announce that the morning repast was ready, and that in another hour the coach which was to convey them on their return home would arrive, interrupted any further conversation upon the subject which had engrossed their attention on the present occasion, and, after exchanging congratulations with the good woman on the favourable change in the weather, they accompanied her below.

The morning's repast was over, Amy and Phoebe quickly made their arrangements for their return home, which, in fact, required but little time to accomplish, and they had taken a parting view of the harbour, from which the Invulnerable had sailed, when the coach arrived at the door of the tavern, and our heroine and her friend were escorted to it, with many kind wishes for their future welfare, by the landlady, and having entered it, and all the other passengers having previously taken their places, the vehicle was about to drive off, when they were startled by a strange and discordant yell, or shriek, or laugh of mockery, which seemed to proceed from some person near. The tones of that unnatural voice were familiar to the ears of Phoebe, painfully indeed so, and, as a feeling of the most unconquerable dread came over her, she turned her eyes in the direction from whence they proceeded, and there, standing on an embankment by the side of the old inn, or tavern, was the haggard and repulsive form of that mysterious being who had so often appeared before her, and always as the harbinger of evil—the old gipsy sybil.

Time seemed to have wrought no change

in the aspect and general personal appearance of that remarkable old woman, unless it was to make her more ugly, and to add to the sardonic grin of mingled malice, scorn, and triumph which had ever characterised her harsh, forbidding, and almost unearthly features; her bright twinkling and piercing eyes, were fixed steadfastly upon the pale countenance of our heroine, as she leaned her head out of the window of the coach, and she seemed to enjoy the terror which Phoebe could not fail to evince, and again she laughed aloud, as she stepped from the embankment close up to the window of the coach, and there stood in a fixed attitude, unmindful of any one apparently than the one fair and unfortunate being who seemed to be the sole object of her unwelcome visit.

Phoebe was perfectly astounded and alarmed, but she was so taken by surprise, and the sudden and unexpected appearance of the gipsy, that she could not utter a syllable, but continued to stare at her aghast, and in trembling expectation of what was about to follow.

The other "inside" passengers were too busily occupied with their own affairs to take any notice of the circumstance, or probably, if they did, only imagining that it was some wretched mendicant who sought charity. But Amy, who could not but observe with surprise and anxiety the extreme agitation and pallid looks of her companion, wishing to obtain a solution of the mystery, in a voice half timid, half peremptory, demanded—

"Now, woman, what is your business, that you thus seem to gaze so earnestly and with such strange meaning at my friend?"

"My business is with her whom you please to call your friend," answered the sybil, in her usual disagreeable voice, "and not with you, Amy Ashford. Phoebe Mayfield, alias Lady Selborne, you remember me?"

"Oh, yes, yes, too well," hastily gasped forth our heroine, in a voice of extreme agitation which she could neither conceal or control; "fearful, mysterious woman what are your motives for thus seeming to take delight to torture and annoy me, and why do you appear before me on the present occasion?"

"To warn you, girl," replied the sybil, "not to be too warm and sanguine in your hopes and expectations; for fresh clouds are gathering on the horizon of your destiny, your troubles are not yet at an end. Beware, should Henry Ashford ever again return to his native land, beware how you continue to encourage his passion or bestow your hand upon him, lest you become amenable to the

law, and may afterwards have bitter cause to repent."

Phoebe could not suppress a cry of terror as she listened to this strange warning, and encountered the keen and almost unearthly looks that the gipsy fixed upon her, though she could not sufficiently command herself to question her farther, but Amy, whose anxiety and curiosity were excited to the utmost degree, and who was determined to arrive at some satisfactory explanation, if possible, addressing herself in a firm voice to the gipsy, said—

"I know not who you are, and what benefit you may think to derive by thus exciting the fears of my companion, but I once more demand from you the reason of this annoyance, and what is the meaning of your ambiguous words."

The sybil again laughed scornfully, and removing her eyes from the countenance of our heroine to that of Amy, seemed about to make some reply to the question which the latter had put to her, when the guard sounded his horn, and the coach was driven rapidly away, the old woman remaining on the same spot and in the same attitude, till the vehicle turning round an abrupt corner of the road, she was hidden from the sight.

This adventure had evidently made a strong impression upon the mind of our heroine, and excited her utmost alarm, and Amy wished to question her upon the subject and to endeavour to offer her advice and consolation, but there being other persons in the coach they were prevented from communicating their thoughts freely, and were thus left to their own individual conjectures upon the subject.

Phoebe was indeed greatly agitated at this repeated meeting with the sybil, and it was in vain that she endeavoured to treat her strange predictions with the indifference and contempt which they would seem to deserve.

She was not superstitious, but what the old woman had uttered on the two or three previous occasions when she had been in the company of Lord Selborne, being so nearly fulfilled, that she could not but mark all she said with a degree of uneasiness which she found it almost impossible to conquer.

But from this subject her thoughts were quickly diverted to the more important one of Henry Ashford, and the circumstances that might befall him ere they should meet again, if indeed they were ever fated to do so, and various were the observations and speculations that passed between her and Amy, and the hopes and fears that alternately agitated their breasts. But putting their trust in providence, they endeavoured to take courage, and to look forward to the best.

Nothing particular, after the adventure which has been recorded, took place on the journey, and in due time they alighted from the coach at the inn near the village of Dewsbury.

But both Phoebe and Amy could not but entertain a feeling of melancholy and regret as they once more approached the cottage which had till within the last few days been gladdened by the presence of Henry, who was now far away upon the ocean, whose manly voice they could no longer listen to, and whom it might be so long ere they would meet again. They entered it with gloomy and torturing thoughts which they could not banish, and embracing with the affection of two sisters, they for some time could do nothing but weep upon each other's bosom.

Sad and gloomy were the hours that followed, many were the melancholy observations which they exchanged with each other, but their feelings were so perfectly alike that they had no advice or argument to offer to one another, and they both therefore remained inconsolable.

They dwelt upon the different articles contained in the cottage that reminded them of him, with feelings of the most painful interest, the chair he used to occupy, the playthings of his childhood, too, which had been carefully and fondly preserved; the books that he most delighted to read, and which were also the works of Phoebe's favourite authors, some sketches that he had himself drawn—for Henry was a self-taught artist, and clever at the pencil—but that which Phoebe and Amy prized more than all was the portrait of himself, which he had painted on his return from his first voyage, and was very skillfully executed.

This was suspended over the mantel-piece in the parlour of the cottage, and looked so life-like, that the lips seemed parting as if about to address the beholder, and it completely rivetted the attention, and could not fail to excite admiration.

On this loved portrait the eyes of Phoebe and Amy were almost constantly fixed, and their tears flowed fast as they gazed upon it. Then they would kneel before it, and supplicate the blessings of heaven upon the head of the original, and pray that he might triumphantly surmount all the dangers and hardships he would doubtless have to experience, and once more, and before long, again return in safety to his native land, and that they might never more be separated from him, he having resolved, if possible, that this should be his last voyage.

And thus drearily did the fair friends pass the time after their return to the cottage, and felt so truly wretched that they were

quite unfitted for anything. Notwithstanding the contempt with which Amy affected to treat them, our heroine could not help remembering the strange warning and prognostications of the gipsy sybil with fear and trembling. But the words she had uttered as regarded her marriage with Henry Ashford being illegal, and that if she persisted in it she would be guilty of a crime which she would afterwards have bitter cause to repent, surprised, tortured, and bewildered her more than all, and she racked her brain in vain to endeavour to penetrate the mystery in which they were enshrouded.

Was not Henry, like herself, free and unshackled? Was not their love mutual? and what then could there possibly be to forbid their union? Nothing, and in that idea, in which Amy sought to strengthen her, she endeavoured to be satisfied, and to treat the warning with indifference.

The news of Phoebe and Amy's return home soon reached the village, and many of their rustic friends lost no time in visiting them, in order to express their congratulations, and to offer their best wishes for Henry's prosperity, for his being able successfully to brave the perils of the battle and the wave, and his speedy return.

Amy and our heroine fully appreciated the friendship and good feeling that prompted those kind attentions, and they received them with all the respect and gratitude that was due.

But when the worthy Mr. Stubbles became aware that Phoebe was again at home, he rather hesitated in the delicate and painful information he had to give her, respecting her unfortunate father, as to how he should act. Knowing the anguish it must cause her to hear of the hopeless state of the poor old man, and his present deplorable situation, he was aware that it was necessary the intelligence should be communicated to her with the utmost precaution, or the shock might be too great for her to sustain, and he rather doubted whether he had abilities sufficient, however good his will, and anxious his wishes, to accomplish that task satisfactorily. However, it must be done, and he therefore departed alone to the cottage, determined to acquit himself in the best manner he could.

Phoebe and Amy sincerely expressed their pleasure at seeing their old friend, and after some preliminary and trifling observations he prepared, with a great deal of faltering and stammering, for the task he had imposed upon himself, though he scarcely knew how to begin.

They saw by his looks and the uneasiness of his manner, that he had something to communicate, and they were impatient to

hear what it was. But when Mr. Stubbles mentioned the name of her father, Phoebe evinced the greatest emotion, and eagerly inquired whether anything had been heard of him, and if he still lived.

"Why, yes, Miss Phoebe," replied Stubbles, still hesitating, and at a loss what to say, "thank God your father still lives, poor old man, and—but—I hope, that is to say."

"Ah, you hesitate," said the agitated Phoebe, "and your looks bespeak some fearful news; oh, I pray you, my good friend, do not keep me in this state of torturing suspense. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, Phoebe," answered Mr. Stubbles, "I have indeed seen him, and it grieved me to the heart when I did so. For he looked so wild, so careworn, so wretched, and unlike himself, that I hardly knew him, and I almost regretted that I had called again at the mad-house, for you must know, miss, he was so bad, and raving in such a manner that they would not let me see him the first time I went there."

"The mad-house!" exclaimed our heroine in a voice of the most indescribable agony; "oh, God! my worst fears then are realised, unfortunate father, here, at any rate, is one of the terrible and fatal consequences of my guilty conduct."

"Do not agitate yourself thus, my dear Phoebe," said Amy, soothingly, "but rather be thankful to heaven for hitherto preserving your unhappy parent from the untimely fate we all had too much reason to fear had befallen him. My good friend, Mr. Stubbles, I pray you be explicit, and relate to us all the melancholy particulars with which you have become acquainted."

With this request Mr. Stubbles complied in the best manner he could, and the reader may imagine the anguish with which our heroine and her friend Amy listened to the melancholy particulars. Scalding tears chased each other rapidly down the cheeks of Phoebe, and it was some time ere she could sufficiently recover herself to give expression in words to the torturing feelings excited in her breast. To know that her father still lived was indeed some melancholy relief to her anxiety, but to hear of the dreadful and violent form his fatal malady had assumed and the little chance there was of his ever recovering from it, was enough to distract her brain, already racked by so many painful thoughts, and to drive her to despair.

"But," she exclaimed, after a pause, "although the interview break my heart, I must, I will see him, and endeavour, if only for a brief interval, to awaken him to reason, so that he may recognise his unhappy daughter, and pronounce his pardon for her

errors. Heaven will, I trust, give me fortitude to support the sad, the agonising meeting."

"True," coincided Amy, "but, at any rate, you had better delay the task till to-morrow, by which time you may have become more composed, and better prepared to encounter a scene which no doubt will be of the most painful and exciting description. I will then accompany you."

Mr. Stubbles seconded this suggestion—to which Phoebe, after some hesitation, assented, and, after some further conversation he took his leave, very well satisfied that he had accomplished his errand.

When he was gone our heroine gave free vent to the grief which, under the painful circumstances, could not but distress her mind, and in which the amiable and tender-hearted Amy fully shared, although she sought to control it as much as possible with the hope of subduing or ameliorating by her advice and consolation that of her unfortunate companion.

"Providence has mercifully watched over the poor old man in his wild wanderings, Phoebe," she remarked, "and prevented him even in his madness from laying violent hands on himself. You must, you do, I am convinced, feel grateful for that. You also know that he is now safe, that you can see him frequently, and that with skilful treatment, which he will no doubt receive in the asylum and by your own anxious and affectionate exertions and attentions, he may in time recover from the fearful malady, which at present lays prostrate his intellect, and, with returning reason, receive you again to his heart."

"All-merciful God grant that your kind hopes and wishes may be realised, dear Amy," fervently ejaculated Phoebe, "for I know that they are sincere. But, alas, I dare not encourage such flattering thoughts. Beloved unfortunate father, surely your sufferings have been too severe. Oh, could the light of reason once more dawn upon your brain, and convinced of your wretched daughter's sincere penitence, you would pronounce her pardon and receive her once more to your heart, what nameless, what unbounded happiness would be her's; with what devoted love would she watch over you, console and comfort you, and do all that child can do, to render your declining years those of happiness and peace."

Amy still tried to comfort and to reassure her, but so melancholy were all the circumstances by which she was surrounded, that this was no easy task to accomplish; and the day passed gloomily away, Phoebe looking forward to the morrow with mingled dread and anxiety.

It came, and after some time occupied in endeavouring to acquire fortitude, and to tranquillise her feelings, she left the cottage, accompanied by Amy.

The lunatic asylum to which poor old Mark Mayfield had been conveyed, was as has been before stated, situated some miles from the village of Freshfield, so that our heroine had plenty of time to collect her thoughts, and to prepare herself for the painful and melancholy task she had to perform, on the way. But the nearer she approached the asylum, the more did her heart seem to sink within her, and her courage to fail her, and she almost doubted whether she could indeed find strength or resolution sufficient to support the interview.

On arriving at the asylum, however, they were informed that the unfortunate patient was in that violent state, that it was necessary to place him under the greatest restraint and that therefore the melancholy interview which Phoebe and her companion had proposed to themselves, could not possibly take place at present.

With what feelings of anguish did our heroine hear this, although it was no more than her fears had anticipated; and after in vain requesting to be permitted only to see him from some place where he could not observe her, and begged that every care and attention should be paid to him, with the most poignant feelings of sorrow, Phoebe and Amy turned away from the gloomy building, and slowly retraced their steps towards the cottage.

"Oh, how exquisitely torturing is this suspense," sighed Phoebe, as they proceeded on their way, "alas, I feel convinced that my poor father's case is hopeless, that his reason has fled for ever, and death would be a mercy to him, rather than that he should live to suffer thus frightfully. But oh, could his senses be restored to him, if only for a brief period, that I might hear him again acknowledge me for his daughter, and pronounce my forgiveness, methinks I could be content and resigned."

"These hopes, I sincerely trust, Phoebe," replied Amy, "will yet be realised, however gloomy and cheerless everything may for the present appear. Come, my dear friend, I must not suffer you to abandon yourself entirely to despair."

"Alas, how can I help doing so under all the dreadful circumstances?" returned our heroine, "this calamity, coupled with the departure of Henry, is almost too much for human endurance. Oh, I am surely one of the most miserable and unfortunate of human beings."

"Be comforted," said Amy, soothingly, "and endeavour to look forward to a happy

change ere long, for I cannot but feel confident that it will shortly take place."

Phoebe shook her head, but made no reply, and, after a time they once more arrived at home.

Day after day did Phoebe and Amy continue to visit the lunatic asylum for more than a week, before an interview was permitted to take place between the wretched maniac and his daughter, as no change for the better had yet taken place, and the agony and suspense of the poor girl were almost too painful and overwhelming for her to endure.

But at length she was informed that, under the most careful treatment, the violence of his malady was, so far subdued, that he had become comparatively calm, that he was removed from the mattress upon which it had been necessary to strap him, and that he was now placed in a comfortable cell, under the constant care of a keeper.

Under those circumstances, the medical gentleman attached to the asylum considered that the interview might be permitted, but thought it advisable—though for what reasons he did not state—that Amy should not be present at the same.

Amy much regretted this, but she did not attempt to remonstrate, and Phoebe, with a palpitating heart, and trembling expectation, was conducted across a large court-yard, and along a passage, at the end of which were arranged a series of cells, the mingled wild laughter, singing, shouting, crying, lamentation, and every description of sound that proceeded from which startled her, and caused a sickly sensation of dread and anguish to come over her, which she found it impossible to resist.

The keeper conducted her a little to the right, and pointing out a door, in which was a small wicket through which anything might be conveyed, and a view of the interior of the cell could be obtained, informed her that was the place in which her father was confined.

Phoebe paused, and trembled more violently than before; and again she felt that she could never find fortitude sufficient to support the painful scene.

The keeper whispered to her that she probably would like to view the interior of the cell, and the appearance of her father, through the wicket, previous to entering his presence; and, approving of the suggestion, was advancing to do so, when she was arrested by hearing her poor father's voice, singing in the same jovial and hearty strain that he had been wont to do in his days of happiness, his favourite old country ditty of "Young Roger the Miller," and every faculty was suspended, and her heart seemed to

swell almost to bursting, as she listened to it, and recalled to her memory with overwhelming force the melancholy circumstances of the past, while tears unrestrained gushed from her eyes, and streamed down her pale and careworn cheeks.

The poor old man having finished his song, which he sang correctly and throughout, word for word, burst into a hearty fit of laughter, which sounded, if possible, still more painfully in the ears of Phoebe, than the song had done, and again she hesitated to approach the door, and to gaze upon him.

"That is the way the poor man usually amuses himself in his calm moments," observed the keeper, "he has been able to sing a good song in his time, I have no doubt."

"Does he ever mention the name of Phoebe?" eagerly inquired our heroine.

"I have never heard him," replied the keeper, "but he sometimes talks of his daughter, wildly and strangely like, and then he will weep and moan for an hour together, like a child. His impression seems to be that you are dead, Miss Mayfield."

"Alas," she sighed, "it would have been far better that I had, rather than live to have to meet so dreadful a trial as this."

"Hark," said the keeper, "he is at it again. Egad, the poor old man is in one of his merriest moods this morning."

Merry! how the word uttered thoughtlessly but not unfeelingly by the keeper, went to the heart of Phoebe. But she again listened with breathless attention to her father's voice, who was now singing another well known country ditty, the concluding lines of which are something to the effect of,

"My mother does nothing but spin,
My father's a hedger and ditcher,
And the money comes slowly in."

At length he finished his song, and once more he laughed apparently in all the boisterous mirth of happiness and high glee. But after a time he became silent, and then with a trembling step and a throbbing heart Phoebe approached the wicket, and gazed into the cell.

With what feelings of anguish she gazed upon the painful scene which met her sight.

The poor old man was seated in a gloomy corner of the cell, playing like a child with a faded bunch of flowers, the withered leaves and petals of which he picked off one by one, and arranged them carefully on his lap, muttering and talking to himself, and laughing occasionally.

His old clothes had been removed, and replaced by others, coarse but more decent and comfortable, and he had been thoroughly washed and shaved, but still his appearance was wretched in the extreme, and the expres-

sion of his squalid features was heartrending to behold.

Convulsive sobs heaved the bosom of our heroine as she gazed upon him, and her tears almost blinded her.

"Now, miss," said the keeper, as he placed the key in the lock, "he seems quite calm, so you cannot have a better opportunity of approaching him, though I must be present at the meeting, in case he should become excited."

He unlocked the door, and entered the cell as he spoke, and Phoebe stood trembling in the doorway. At the entrance of the keeper, he uttered a wild sort of exclamation, and started to his feet, but on recognising him he became calm in an instant, and advancing to him, he took his hand, smiling, and evincing every sign of pleasure and gratification.

The keeper motioned to Phoebe, and with a trembling step and a faltering heart she entered the cell, and no sooner did her father behold her, than he relinquished his hold of the keeper's hand, and eagerly approaching her, he patted her cheeks playfully, and laughed as merrily as she had heard him before.

"Pretty lady, pretty lady," he said, in tones that thrilled to the heart of our heroine, "so you have come to see the poor old man in his new mansion. Oh, how kind is this. Come, come, fair lady, let us take a walk together in the green fields and meadows and the beautiful gardens, and I will gather for you a garland of the prettiest flowers to place in your hair, and you will be watchful and careful of them, for flowers soon fade, and all things do wither and die. Alas, why should they do so?—ah, me."

He sighed deeply, and so great was the emotions that agitated the breast of Phoebe that they completely choked her utterance.

Suddenly, however he started wildly, and flinging her hand, which he had taken, from him, he exclaimed fiercely—

"Away! get thee hence, thou art a woman, all deceptive smiles and base hypocrisy. Begone, I say, for all women be false and treacherous, as they be fair and flattering. Blight, ruin, desolation follow wherever they approach. There be poison on their lips, and contamination in their presence. There wur never but one good woman, and that wur her they called poor Dame Mayfield, my wife. But she died, poor thing, she died, and it wur the cruel conduct of the child she did so fondly love that broke her heart, and sent her to the cold and silent grave beneath the yew-tree in the o'd churchyard."

"Father, dear, afflicted father," frantically cried the distracted Phoebe, as she threw herself on her knees at his feet, and looked

up in his face with an expression of agony which no language can describe.

At the sound of her voice he seemed to be electrified, and his features became frightfully distorted, and his whole frame was convulsed in the most violent manner.

"Feyther!" he almost shrieked, as he clenched his fist, and gazed fiercely down upon her; "what taunting, mocking wretch be thou, that darest to utter that name? Feyther's should ha'e daughters good, innocent, loving, to watch and comfort them in their old age. But I ne'er had a child, or it be not likely that she would e're have deserted me, and left me here alone. Away, abandoned one, lest in my wrath I strike thee, and—"

He raised his fist menacingly in the air as he spoke, but the keeper interposed, and seizing the old man's arms, he said, addressing himself to the broken-hearted Phoebe—

"You must now retire, it would be dangerous to prolong this scene."

Our heroine, bursting with grief and agony, arose from her knees, while her father still struggled in the hold of the keeper, raving frightfully, and staggered from the cell. She paused, however, before the wicket where the wretched old man could not observe her, and with the most torturing anxiety watched the result of this mad paroxysm.

The contest between the unfortunate lunatic and the keeper, however, did not last long, the former, after a few violent struggles, submitted like a child, became perfectly calm and quiet, and retiring to his mattress, stretched himself upon it, apparently exhausted.

The keeper then left the cell, and rejoined Phoebe, to conduct her again to her friend, who, as may be imagined, was waiting her return with the greatest impatience and anxiety, and had thought the time particularly long and tedious that she had been absent.

"The poor old man must not be disturbed again to-day," remarked the keeper, "or he will once more become excited. He has not been so subject to those fits for the last day or two, he is much attached to me, I know how to manage him, and I do not find much difficulty in doing so, by humouring him a little."

"For the love of heaven," said Phoebe, with much emotion, "treat him with all the kindness and indulgence that his unfortunate case will admit."

"Oh, yes, miss, replied the man, "you may depend upon that, for I have a poor old father of my own, and God knows how soon he may be in the same unfortunate situation. Lor bless you, Miss Mayfield, although we keepers are obliged to be determined and to appear stern at times, we have some of us

got hearts that can feel, as well as other people, and are not such a cruel set of beings as we have been represented."

"I do believe you," replied Phoebe, "and have every confidence in your humanity."

They now rejoined Amy, who could perceive by the marked expression of grief upon the countenance of our heroine, that the interview had been one of the most painful and exciting description. They left the asylum together, after Phoebe had warmly expressed her thanks to the keeper for the kindness and attention he had shown her.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HARRY ASHFORD AFLOAT.—THE PERILS OF THE DEEP.—THE STORM AT SEA.

As Phoebe and Amy proceeded on their return to the cottage, the latter eagerly inquired the particulars of the interview, and the situation in which she had found her unfortunate parent.

Sad indeed was the account which Phoebe had to give her, and such was the agitation and excitement of her feelings that it was not without the greatest difficulty she could do so.

Amy listened to her with feelings of the deepest sympathy and interest, and so hurt was she by the melancholy account, that she was at a complete loss to find words in which she might afford her some consolation. Indeed, the poor girl was in no state of mind to receive it, even though offered by so kind and dear a friend as Amy Ashford.

"Alas," she sighed, "how can I do otherwise than abandon myself to despair after the heartrending scene I have witnessed? There is indeed not the least ray of hope for me; I see too plainly that the reason of my wretched parent is fled for ever."

"Say not so, dear Phoebe," said her friend, "endeavour to think otherwise, for deplorable and hopeless as your poor father's state of mind at present appears to be, there is no knowing how soon heaven in its infinite mercy may bring about a favourable change, and ultimately completely restore him to his senses."

"Oh, I cannot, dare not flatter myself with the hope," returned our heroine, "for certain do I feel that it would prove to be delusive. Never, never can I forget his fearful appearance, his wild and piteous looks, his melancholy lamentations, his frantic mirth, and then his frightful ravings, and the awful words he addressed to me. The recollection is enough to drive my brain to madness."



Again Amy tried to soothe her, but to no purpose, and she therefore abandoned the attempt, and they proceeded for the remainder of the journey almost in silence, each being too busily occupied with their own melancholy meditations to feel any inclination to enter into conversation.

A week passed away, every day Phoebe visited the asylum to inquire after the state of her afflicted parent, although after the scene which had taken place at their first meeting, anxious though she was, she could not find resolution to see him again, and she was advised by the medical officer of the establishment not to do so, as it could answer no good purpose, but, on the contrary, might tend to excite the unhappy patient, and add to the melancholy malady under which he laboured.

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The account she heard of him by no means served to decrease her anguish, or to raise her hopes. He continued in much the same state, though at times since their meeting, she was informed, he was more violent than he had been before, and it was necessary to watch him carefully, to have the attendance of two keepers—for like most mad people, he displayed the most remarkable physical strength—and to place him under the greatest restraint, to prevent him doing mischief to himself or others.

Leaving our heroine and Amy Ashford for awhile we will now proceed to follow Henry on his voyage.

The Invulnerable had now been more than a fortnight at sea, and with the exception of the storm which occurred soon after leaving the harbour, they had hitherto had favoura-

able weather, and proceeded on their course with all the speed that the winds and the waves could bear them.

The thoughts of the young mariner, Henry Ashford were constantly fixed on his beloved Phoebe and his sister, and many were the prayers and blessings he invoked for their welfare and happiness.

Happiness! he knew too well that could not be their's whilst he was away, and under the melancholy circumstances in which they were placed, but he trusted that providence would give them fortitude to support their sorrows, and cares, and anxieties with patience and resignation.

The situation of poor old Mark Mayfield, too, and upon whose fate the happiness of Phoebe so much depended, frequently occupied his mind, and filled him with various doubts and gloomy apprehensions, although he endeavoured to hope for the best.

Oft in the dreary mid-watch, or when swinging in his hammock, his thoughts would wander to his humble but comfortable home, and he would picture to himself his Phoebe and Amy sitting in the neat little parlour, with pensive looks, and tearful eyes, conversing about him, and forming various and conflicting speculations as to the fate which attended him on the perilous deep. He could see them as distinctly and vividly in his imagination, as if they were absolutely before him; and he could almost imagine that he heard the silvery tones of Phoebe's gentle voice, as with fervent affection she repeated his name, and breathed a prayer for his safety.

In these reflections, and recalling to his memory the many fond vows of love she had uttered to him, he found a melancholy consolation, and tried to look forward with hope and confidence to the time, when having surmounted all dangers, he should return to the happy shores of old England, and be once more moored in the arms of those fair beings who so completely occupied his heart.

It was Saturday night at sea, and the crew were enjoying themselves in the usual manner on such occasions. They had got the grog on board, and the song and the dance, to the music of a black fiddler, merrily prevailed, interspersed with many a tough yarn, which set the whole of the jovial tars in a roar.

Although Henry's thoughts still wandered to home, and the loved beings who occupied it, he did not fail to mingle heartily in the mirth of his shipmates, with whom he was a special favourite, and on this occasion he was one of the merriest among them, he sung his song, spun his yarn, and joined in the dance with a spirit equal to that which he had ever displayed, and was the very soul

and life of the happy company. There was a sharp breeze blowing, and the vessel scudded merrily before the wind to the music of the waves as they dashed against its sides. There was a bright clear moon, whose beams danced and glittered upon the broad waters with an effect truly beautiful.

Suddenly there was a cry of ship to larboard, and the lieutenant ascended the poop—the captain being in his cabin below—with his glass and endeavoured to make her out.

"Can you observe what she is, Mr. Morton?" interrogated the captain, who had now come on deck.

"No, sir," answered the lieutenant, "not distinctly, for she is too far off, but she looms large."

"Continue to watch her," said the captain, "for there are many pirates cruising about this coast, and we must not suffer any of the rascals to escape us if possible."

"The moon now better assists my observations, sir," said Lieutenant Morton, after he had been watching the strange vessel for a few minutes, "from her build I should take her to be a schooner of a large size, she is a suspicious looking craft, and seems to be endeavouring to avoid us."

"I'm sorry to interrupt you in your festivities my lads," observed the captain, addressing himself to the crew, "but duty before pleasure. Each man to his post; if the wind only continues in our favour we shall soon be athwart the stranger, and should my suspicions be correct, we shall have some sport presently. To your duty, my lads—to your duty."

"Aye, aye, your honour," said the seamen, and each one hurried to obey orders.

The moon, however, suddenly became overcast by black and threatening clouds, and the strange vessel was no longer to be seen.

The wind veered, and gradually strengthened until it blew a stiff gale, and everything gave token of an approaching storm. The contrast which the aspect of all around now presented to the cheerful scene which prevailed so short a time before, was most remarkable. The darkness became intense, and the wind continued to rise in violence, until it blew almost a hurricane, and the waves rolled to a mountainous height, and howled and bellowed in their increasing wrath.

All was now bustle and activity on deck, for it was evident that a storm was coming, and that they would have a rough night, and no one was more active or rendered better service than Henry Ashford on that occasion.

The storm commenced; wind and rain,

thunder and lightning, soon fiercely battled with each other, and completed the horrors of the scene.

The gallant ship was driven completely out of her course, and so fearful was the storm she had to struggle against, that in a short time she became almost unmanageable.

For several hours the storm continued, and the noble *Invulnerable*, which had weathered many a fierce tempest, was tossed about like a straw, her situation becoming every minute more critical, and the danger more imminent. They were compelled to part with several of their guns to lighten her, and yet their situation seemed to be but very little amended, and the result unless the tempest abated was extremely doubtful.

The manly heart of Harry was a stranger to fear, he ever put his trust in providence, and his courage never forsook him, but when he thought of Phoebe and his sister, and of the probability that he might never behold them again, he could not altogether subdue the powerful emotions that agitated his breast, and earnestly and solemnly prayed that heaven might preserve him for their sakes.

The lightning became more vivid and terrific every moment, lighting up the horizon, and reflecting on the furious waves for miles, and they now again caught sight of the strange vessel at a distance, apparently much disabled, and tossed about at the mercy of the angry billows, threatening every moment to founder.

And thus the storm continued to rage with undiminished violence till the morning—the *Invulnerable* having received much damage, but weathering it bravely.

And now the wind abated, the thunder gradually ceased to roar, the black clouds dispersed, and the sun gradually broke through the darkness which had hitherto prevailed, and the dangers of the night were past.

Nothing was now to be seen of the ship, and there could be very little doubt that it was wrecked, and that every soul on board had perished. Presently, however, a boat was seen in the distance, making towards the vessel, and in which two or three persons could be distinguished by means of the glass, and the order was given by the captain for the *Invulnerable* to heave too, and a boat to put off to the assistance of the shipwrecked men; which was promptly done, Harry Ashford having command of the boat.

CHAPTER L.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

The persons in the boat waved their handkerchiefs in the air with apparent delight, as Harry and his shipmates approached, as the prospect of relief was so near, and yet when they got clear within sight of the vessel, and to discover her character, a change seemed to come over their feelings, and they appeared to be anxious to avoid the boat. That, however was useless, and Harry and his companions were quickly along side of them.

There were three men only in the boat, which was much shattered, and could not possibly have held together much longer, and two of them—for one was seated in the boat with his back towards them, so that they could not perceive his features—were as ruffianly-looking fellows as could well be imagined, and seemed to eye Harry and his shipmates with dread rather than satisfaction.

"What ship?" demanded Harry.

At the sound of his voice the man whose features had been concealed from them uttered an exclamation of surprise, and hastily turning round, Harry had a full view of his face, which was half covered with a huge pair of bushy black whiskers, but what he could see of his features struck him forcibly as being remarkably familiar to him, and the man having apparently satisfied himself, seemed to shrink from his gaze.

"What ship?" repeated Harry.

No one answered, and the men exchanged significant glances with each other, as if silently consulting each other what to do.

"Damme," said Harry, "are ye ashamed of your craft that you do not answer my question? This looks suspicious. However, we will e'en take you on board our ship, and then we can take soundings, and overhaul your papers."

"We will save you that trouble," said the man who had so particularly attracted the attention and excited the curiosity of Harry, coming forward, "Henry Ashford, it is a damned bad wind that has brought us together, but I suppose when you look more narrowly at me, you cannot well help recognising an old acquaintance."

"Ah, the villain Beaufort," exclaimed the astonished Henry, as he indeed recognised the forbidding features of his old enemy. "This meeting is indeed most extraordinary, and sufficiently explains the character of you all, and that of the lawless vessel to which you belonged. Into the boat with the pirates, messmates, they must give a

better account of themselves before we part company."

"Aye, pirates if you will," said one of the pirates, with a look of scorn and defiance, "there is no occasion for any further concealment. Your vessel is the Invulnerable and we therefore know our fate, and we will meet it with the courage of the crew of the Sea Wolf."

"Ah, the Sea Wolf," cried Harry, "it is a pity that desperate craft, which has so long been the scourge of the Atlantic ocean, escaped the sound thrashing we would have given it, had she not met with destruction in the storm. Away with them."

The ruffians made some show of resistance, and attempted to jump into the sea, but they were quickly secured in the boat which then put off on its return to the ship, Beaufort seating himself with cool indifference in the midst of them, and gazing at Henry with mingled looks of hatred and scorn.

Captain Beaufort's career had so far been a chequered one, and one of the most unmitigated guilt. By birth a gentleman and connected with a most wealthy and noble family; with talents of the first order, ready wit, an insinuating address, and prepossessing personal appearance, and a handsome fortune, no young man could possibly enter upon the world under more favourable circumstances; but his naturally depraved mind and vicious habits, completely nullified, destroyed all these advantages; and it has been shown how through his own guilty propensities he was reduced from a highly respectable position in society to the lowest state of misery and degradation. We have seen him as the fashionable *roue* moving in the highest circles of the aristocracy—we have seen him as the ruined spendthrift—then the associate of thieves and wretches of the worst description, and now we find him an escaped convict, and one of the lawless crew of the pirate ship known by the name of the Sea Wolf, and which for years had been the terror of the Atlantic ocean, as it seemed to set capture and defeat alike at defiance.

Such was the guilty course which the villain Beaufort had, from the earliest days of youth, pursued, and he had become so inured to, so hardened in crime, that all traces of his former position in society were completely lost in his present unqualified ruffianism; and as he now appeared, it was impossible that any one could look the character of the miscreant to greater perfection, even if they had, in stage phraseology, been specially "made up" for the part.

He wore a red Guernsey, with coarse canvas trowsers, and a broad leather belt round his waist, but minus the pistols and the

long-bladed knife which he usually carried in it, or there can be no doubt that he would have made a desperate resistance, and bloodshed would have been the consequence.

His face was dark and sunburnt, his eyebrows had become shaggy, and, as has been before before stated, he wore large bushy black whiskers which added to the low villainy of his general appearance.

But what had become of his *amiable* friend, and prince of scamps, the redoubtable and notorious Sam Filcher, "the sprig of myrtle?"

We shall see.

We left them after the affray near the village of Dewsbury, and in which Beaufort lost the skirts of his coat—in one of the pockets of which were those papers upon which he seemed to set so inestimable a value, and Mr. Bob Bristles to consider of such vast importance that nothing could induce him to reveal the secret they contained—in a state of discomfiture, and rather at a loss what course to pursue, although they were fully resolved that it should not be an honest one. However, to remain any longer in that neighbourhood, where they were now known would not be safe or prudent, and they therefore made their way from it as fast as they could, Beaufort being still resolved, at all hazards, to endeavour to discover Lord Selborne, with the hope by the means of threats to be able to extort money from him.

Considering that it was dangerous to travel in the daylight, they sought out an old barn near the roadside, in which they concealed themselves till the darkness of the night had set in, and arranged some of their plans for the future.

"Now, captain," said Sam Filcher, in the course of conversation, "what about these ere dokinents, as yer call's 'em, vot vos in that blessed coat-pocket o' your'n as you vos foolish enough to leave in the hands o' the beadle? Come, yer know, as ve're sworn pals and friends, ve should not have no secrets from von another."

"Indeed," returned Beaufort, with a sneer and a look of contempt, "then, if you think that I am going to gratify your vulgar curiosity Sam, you are much mistaken."

"Wulgar curiosity," returned Filcher, indignantly, "come, I likes that; who do yer call wulgar, I should like to know; ve are both equals now ain't ve? I consider myself as much a gentleman as you, and whichever of us happens to get hanged first, the other will have cause to quake with fear, I reckon, and to guess that it will be his turn next. Wulgar indeed, the sprig o' myrtle don't like such insults and 'sinivations."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Beaufort, "well,

don't be offended Sam, for I'm vexed and bewildered. The fact of it is that the loss of those papers is one of the greatest misfortunes that could have befallen me at the present time, and should those into whose hands they have fallen know how to make proper use of them, the plan I had so cleverly formed in my own mind, and by which I had calculated to have redeemed in a great measure my broken fortunes, will I fear be frustrated. However, I must brave it out in the best manner I can, and endeavour by some means or other to discover Lord Selborne without delay."

"The secret then effects him, eh?" said Sam.

"Yes, yes," replied Beaufort, evasively, "but enough on that subject for the present. Our situation is growing desperate, Sam, not a farthing in the world, ragged and hungry; what is to be done?"

"Why, mend it as soon as possible, in course," replied his worthy companion; "if to-night, so much the better. It's no use being particular, and so if any chance traveller, with plenty of the rowdy about him, should happen to fall in our way, why, in course it will be his fault and not our'n."

To this guilty suggestion Beaufort agreed, and having settled that point, he and Filcher anxiously waited the coming darkness, when they resolved to sally forth on their criminal expedition.

That night the villains put their nefarious designs into execution, and committed a highway robbery, leaving their unfortunate victim nearly dead upon the spot where they had encountered him.

They found a purse and pocket-book upon his person, containing a considerable sum in gold and notes, and well satisfied with this turn of luck, they hurried away in the darkness of the night, and by the morning had got far from the neighbourhood where they had committed the crime, and, as they hoped, out of danger.

They lost no time in altering their personal appearance, and such was the metamorphosis they had undergone that it would have been almost impossible for even those who were intimately acquainted with them to have recognised them.

Beaufort now prosecuted his inquiries and search after Lord Selborne most indefatigably but to no purpose, and after about a month spent in the fruitless attempt, he abandoned it, for the present, as hopeless, and left it to chance or accident to bring about the discovery.

It would be anything but edifying to follow Beaufort and Filcher minutely in their career of crime, suffice it to say that for some time they pursued their guilty course

with considerable success, and escaping detection. But at length fortune deserted them, they were apprehended for a petty robbery, and being convicted, were sentenced to seven years transportation, and were forthwith conveyed on board the hulks, from which in a week or two Beaufort contrived to escape, though his associate in crime was not so fortunate. He wandered about the country committing various depredations, and always being lucky enough to escape detection; and at length rambling to the sea-coast, he fell in company with some of the daring crew of the Sea Wolf, and finding that he was a desperate and determined villain, he was permitted to join them, and thus entered upon another phase in the career of crime.

He had been with the pirates several months, and had distinguished himself among them for brutal courage, when the storm recently described took place, causing the total wreck of the Sea Wolf, and the loss of her captain and the whole of the daring crew, with the exception of Beaufort and his companions.

Having mentioned these facts in explanation of the singular appearance of Beaufort in a new character, we will follow him in the company and safe custody of Henry Ashford on board the Invulnerable.

As the boat proceeded there, in spite of the efforts of Henry to draw him into conversation, and to elicit such particulars as he was curious to know, he maintained a sullen silence, eyeing Henry and the other seamen with looks of scorn, and it was only on one occasion that he was induced to speak, when he said—

"I am your inveterate enemy, Harry Ashford, and so I shall continue to remain; I know your anxiety upon certain matters with which I am acquainted, and on which probably the future happiness of yourself and Phoebe Mayfield depends; but you shall elicit no information from me, on the contrary, it will afford me the greatest gratification to witness your suspense and agony."

"Villain," exclaimed Harry, "you will perhaps alter your tone when we get you on board."

"Bah!" cried Beaufort, contemptuously, "do you take me for such a rank cur as to tremble at the fate which doubtless awaits myself and my comrades? You may hang us like dogs to the yard-arm of your vessel, you will find that we are prepared to meet death with the courage and indifference that becomes the reckless crew of the Sea Wolf."

Henry said no more to the ruffian, for he saw it was useless, and soon afterwards they were on board the Invulnerable, and introduced to the captain in their real characters.

"So," he said, "that rascally pirate craft has run its course at last, and with its inhuman crew has gone to old Davy. 'Tis well. Now you infernal sharks, what have you to say for yourselves?"

"Nothing," answered one of the fellows, sternly, "only to express our thorough contempt for you and your lubberly crew. You have laid your grappling irons upon us, and we must abide by the consequences we suppose."

"You may affect scorn and indifference," returned the captain, "but probably a round dozen or two may serve to cool your courage. Captain Beaufort—for Harry Ashford informs me that you once disgraced his Majesty's service—this is rather a degrading situation for an officer and a gentleman to be placed in."

"And it well becomes you, captain," replied Beaufort, "to taunt and threaten those whom accident have placed in your power. However, I heed it not, neither do my companions, therefore you may as well spare your breath. We do not condescend to ask your mercy; we would not accept it from you, and we are fully prepared to meet all you may inflict on us."

"Very well," my brave fellow," said the captain, "we shall see. Place them in irons till we can decide how we shall dispose of them."

This order was immediately complied with, and the villain Beaufort and his base associates in crime having been thus secured, every man proceeded to his duty, and the Invulnerable, although she had received much damage in the late storm, proceeded rapidly on her way.

CHAPTER LI.

A MOMENT OF PERIL.—THE CONFLAGRATION.

The meeting with Beaufort under such extraordinary circumstances, caused Henry much excitement and surprise; but he knew that it would be useless to attempt to elicit from him such facts as he wished to know, and he was thoroughly convinced from his well known stubborn character that he would maintain his obstinacy to the last.

In this he was not mistaken, Beaufort conducted himself with more determined obstinacy than even his fellow prisoners; neither persuasions nor threats could move him from his taciturnity, and he appeared to look forward to the fate which probably awaited him with perfect indifference.

But the boldness and recklessness of the ruffian Beaufort was in a great measure as-

sumed, and when alone, he resigned himself to those fears and qualms of conscience which he so studiously tried to conceal from everybody else, and shrunk from the anticipation of the future with all the trembling of his naturally cowardly character.

He recalled to his memory his early prospects in life, and pictured to himself the happiness and prosperity that might have been his lot, had it not been for his own guilty propensities, and when he contrasted what he once was with the brutal, abandoned and degraded wretch that he was now, he could not help giving way to feelings of remorse and the deepest regret, and to reproach and condemn himself most severely.

"I have been a mad-brained, head strong fool," he muttered to himself, "and ruined one of the finest prospects that ever fell to the lot of human being. I held an enviable position in the world, had wealth at my command, and might also have commanded the esteem and friendship of those in the highest ranks of society. But an infernal spell seemed to take possession of me, and my own vicious propensities to urge me on to destruction. How swiftly did I ascend the ladder of crime, and stopped not till I became so deeply steeped in guilt that it was useless to attempt to retrace my steps. Oh, what a madman have I been, too well I see it now 'tis too late, and my doom is sealed for ever. And must I die the death of a dog? Are there no means of escape? No, the thought is madness, and I must not entertain it. Curses light upon the accident which has thus placed me in the power of my enemies; better would it have been had I shared the fate of the crew of the Sea Wolf, and perished in the wreck."

He paced the place of his confinement with disordered steps, and muttering bitter curses to himself as these thoughts occurred to him, and harrassed and distracted his guilty mind, and it was some time ere he could regain the least composure.

"And Henry Ashford," he said, after a pause, "what gratification and exultation will my present degraded situation and ultimate fate afford him. That thought tortures me more than all. But let me be firm, let me continue to maintain the same reckless bearing that I have hitherto done, for should I betray my real thoughts and feelings, it would be a double triumph to those whom I so mortally hate, and would fain appear to despise. Nor will I entirely despair, for something may yet transpire to rescue me from the fate which at present seems inevitably to await me."

He did endeavour to become firm, and to await the result of his present misfortunes with patience.

It was the intention of the captain of the Invulnerable to keep his prisoners closely confined until he could place them at the disposal of the proper authorities, and taking advantage of the present favourable winds, he made the best of his way on his voyage, although he found that it would be necessary for him to put into the nearest port, in order to repair the damage which his vessel had received in the late storm.

This he was enabled to do on the following day, and Henry Ashford and some of his shipmates were permitted to go on shore, which for a short time afforded them a welcome change and recreation.

Henry had on one occasion become separated from his companions, and wrapped in the various thoughts that occupied his mind he wandered farther than he had intended, and as the darkness of the night was fast gathering around, and warned him of the lateness of the hour, vexed with himself that he had thus involuntarily neglected his duty, he hastened to retrace his steps to the ship.

His way lay through a lonely part of the island, and remote from any human dwelling, and fearing that from the increasing darkness he might accidentally stray from the right direction, and find it difficult to extricate himself from such a dilemma, he quickened his speed, and was assisted by the moonlight, which had now become clear and brilliant.

He had now made his way into a more open and cheerful part of the island, and the dashing murmuring sound of the distant waves which met his ears, satisfied him that he was in the right direction.

Suddenly, however, he was somewhat startled by hearing the rustling noise of footsteps among the lank grass and under-wood, at a short distance, and looking eagerly in the direction from whence the sounds proceeded, and grasping a pistol which he always carried about him for protection when on shore, he awaited the result of this adventure with some degree of anxiety.

The sounds became more distinct, and approached nearer from a thicket to the right, and Henry was not long kept in suspense for the next minute the form of a man, in a sailor's dress, partly emerged from the gloom of the thicket into the moonlight, but apparently observing Henry, he hastily drew back, and was again hidden from the view among the trees, though not before Henry had an opportunity by the aid of the moon of recognising his person, and his astonishment and almost incredulity may be imagined, when he was convinced that it was the villain Beaufort.

With an exclamation of surprise, he

rushed towards the thicket, just in time to catch a glimpse of his retreating form, and acting on the impulse of the moment, and anxious that the ruffian should not escape if possible, he discharged the contents of his pistol after him, but a loud and contemptuous laugh convinced him it was without effect, and he paused, disappointed, surprised and confused, and knowing that pursuit on his part, stranger as he was to the place, which, however, was probably not unknown to Beaufort, would be useless, and might be fraught with danger.

He was not suffered, however, to remain long in this state, for his ears were suddenly saluted by the voices of men, shouting to each other, and which were familiar to him, and he then beheld several of his shipmates armed, and evidently in pursuit of the villain, hurriedly approaching, and they evinced no little surprise at meeting with him.

They had heard the report of his pistol, and therefore needed not informing that he had seen him, and having ascertained the direction in which he had fled, they all again followed in pursuit, but after proceeding to some distance without discovering him, they abandoned the task as hopeless, and reluctantly returned towards the ship.

Henry learned that the other prisoners were safe on board, and that the manner in which Beaufort had managed to effect his escape was a complete mystery, and could hardly have been accomplished without assistance.

This extraordinary circumstance caused considerable excitement on board, and the other prisoners were equally as much surprised as the captain and crew, but all chance of the ruffian's re-capture was hopeless, as the ship, the necessary repairs being completed, was to resume her voyage on the following morning.

But to return to Phoebe and Amy Ashford.

We left our heroine naturally in a state of great excitement and distress of mind at the continued malady and deplorable condition of her father, and the answers she received to the daily inquiries she made at the establishment of which he was an inmate, gave her no reason to hope for a favourable change, or that, in fact, he would ever again be restored to reason. The painful scene which had taken place at their meeting was ever present to her recollection, and the longer she dwelt on it the more poignant became her anguish and the more dismal her forebodings.

Such indeed was the unfortunate effect which that meeting had taken on the poor old man's benighted brain, and so violent had he ever since become, that it was neces-

sary, as has been before stated, to place him under the greatest restraint, and it was quite uncertain when a repetition of it might be ventured, lest it should be productive of even more fatal consequences.

It had been found necessary to remove him to a different cell in another part of the building, where no one was permitted to see him save the keepers and the medical attendants, so that Phoebe was deprived of even the melancholy satisfaction—which she was allowed to indulge without being observed by him—in the place where he was before confined, and all the horrors of his situation were left entirely to her own imagination, or the information she received from others.

Sometimes she could not but consider that it would be much better if he were dead, than to continue to live in a condition so hopeless and distressing, and at such times she would offer up the most solemn prayers to heaven to release him from his misery and suffering, and to take him to itself. But still it was so awful to anticipate his death before his senses returned to him—if only for a brief period, that he might pronounce his forgiveness, and once more acknowledge her as his daughter—that her heart shrank and trembled at the thought, and she could not contemplate such an occurrence with any degree of fortitude or resignation.

And thus time wore drearily on, a month more elapsed, and still everything remained in the same melancholy state, and no prospect of a change for the better appeared.

Phoebe was quite worn out with continued anxiety, and although Amy did all she could to sustain her and console her, and the worthy Mr. Stubbles and his wife deeply sympathised with her, and together with many of the villagers were very kind to her, it had the most alarming effect upon her constitution, already so greatly impaired, and she was sometimes so ill as to be unable to leave her chamber, and she required the utmost care and attention.

The absence of Henry too, contributed greatly to her anxiety, and many were the fears she entertained for him, and the doubts and apprehensions that they were never destined to behold each other again.

In the company of Amy—who was seldom absent from her presence—she was about this time, sitting in the cool of the evening, at the cottage door, discussing the gloomy subjects that perpetually occupied her mind, and upon which the friendly arguments and persuasions of Amy had but little beneficial effect.

Phoebe had been more than usually depressed during the day, and she could not banish a dismal impression that some fresh trouble was about to befall her, in spite of

the remonstrances of Amy upon the folly and uselessness of giving way to such ideas.

The last rays of the setting sun had faded away in the Western horizon, the grey mists of evening had gathered around, and a solemn silence pervaded everything, which was only broken at intervals by the gentle murmuring of the breeze.

Suddenly the attention of Amy was arrested by an exclamation from her companion, who nudged her arm and pointed significantly towards the distant hills, apparently unable to explain herself in words.

Amy followed eagerly the direction pointed out, and then she immediately understood the cause of our heroine's excitement and alarm. A lurid reflection illuminated the sky, which spread every moment followed by clouds of smoke and showers of sparks, and there could be no doubt that a fearful fire had just broken out at, apparently, a considerable distance beyond the village, and noticing the direction in which it was raging she could not wonder at the agitation of Phoebe, and, in fact, she felt the greatest fears and misgivings herself.

"My heart sinks within me," said Phoebe, "and something seems to convince me that the terrible forebodings that have haunted my imagination during the day are about to be realised. See, Amy, the conflagration is raging in the very direction of the asylum in which my poor father is confined, and the distance seems to correspond with the situation of that building. Oh, God! should it be; the thought distracts me."

"Your fears are premature, dear Phoebe," said her companion, "and I trust groundless—do not unnecessarily alarm yourself."

Our heroine made no reply, but her agitation increased, and she continued to watch the progress of the fire with the utmost anxiety.

The fury of the devouring element evidently every moment strengthened; the work of destruction went fiercely on, and the sky for miles around was in one red glow, which lighted up the trees, the hills, the village, and made distant objects as clearly visible as in the broad daylight.

"Oh, I cannot endure this terrible doubt and suspense," ejaculated Phoebe, "my fears grow upon me apace. I must have them confirmed or removed. Come, Amy, let us no longer remain here."

"What would you do?" inquired the latter.

"Hasten to the village without delay," replied our heroine, "where we may doubtless ascertain where the fire is raging. Come, come, every moment's delay is torturing to me."

Amy saw it was useless to attempt to dis-



suade her from her purpose, she therefore, having helped her on with her hat and cloak, took her arm, and securing the cottage door against intruders, they hurried away as fast as they could towards the village, the conflagration increasing in terror every instant and every step which they advanced.

They were not long in gaining the village, where the greatest excitement prevailed, the rustics rushing to and fro in the greatest terror and bewilderment, without any settled purpose, while Mr. Stubbles was very busy among them, organising parties to proceed to the scene of the conflagration, in order that they might render what assistance they could, and which doubtless was so much required.

On seeing him, Phoebe hastened to him, and in breathless emotion inquired where

the dreadful occurrence was taking place, and the agitation and hesitation of his manner, strengthened her apprehensions.

"Dear me, Miss Phoebe," he said, evidently seeking to evade her question, "how very imprudent it is for you to venture forth into the night air, in the delicate state of your health. Pray enter the cottage of one of our friends, until you have rested yourself, and then return home. This is no scene for you."

"Oh, tell me," said Phoebe, and having paid no attention to his observations, "where is the scene of this fearful catastrophe? Do not, I implore you, keep me in suspense."

Mr. Stubbles still hesitated, and Phoebe grew impatient, but at that moment her most dreadful fears were confirmed; she heard some of the persons who were hurry-

ing past mention the name of the asylum, and with an exclamation of horror and agony—had it not been for clinging to Mr. Stubbles and Amy for support—she must have fallen powerless to the earth.

"Oh, God," she cried, in a voice of the most intense anguish, and clasping her hands together, "my unfortunate father will probably perish in the fierce devouring flames; methinks I hear him now in the wild frenzy of his madness, shrieking for help; horror, horror, must the poor grey-headed old man meet with so fearful a death.

"Pray abate the violence of your anguish, Phoebe," said Amy, although her fears were almost equal to those of the former; "Providence will watch over your unfortunate parent, and rescue him from so terrible a death."

"Nay," returned our heroine, impatiently, "you would flatter me with false hopes. I cannot remain here, let me begone alone to ascertain the fate of my father, if you hesitate to accompany me, I will not be detained."

Thus saying, in the wild agitation of her feelings, she was rushing precipitately from the spot, when Mr. Stubbles and Amy prevented her, and the former said—

"Nay, Phoebe, as you are determined to go—though I must say that I think you would be much better away, and I trust that no harm will befall your poor father—I will accompany you and Miss Amy, though it is too far for you to walk. But Farmer Hodge has offered to lend me his chaise cart, and see, here he approaches with it. Now, Phoebe you must quiet your fears, and muster up all your fortitude."

"Every moment of delay is the most unutterable agony to me," returned Phoebe; "oh, I implore you to be quick."

Farmer Hodge now approached with the cart, into which he and Mr. Stubbles then assisted Phoebe and Amy, and having taken his place in it, he drove off rapidly towards the scene of destruction followed by a posse of the villagers.

The conflagration was now at its height, and such was the rapidity with which the flames spread, that it was evident the building—which was an extensive one—must soon be totally destroyed, and there was the greatest difficulty in extricating the unfortunate inmates from their perilous and frightful situation, and to dispose of them afterwards.

It was a terrific scene, the flames spreading on every side, and the wild shrieks of the wretched lunatics, as they appeared at the different iron-barred windows, or were borne from the burning building, rent the air.

The fire was raging more particularly fearful in that wing of the building where Mark Mayfield was confined, and it was a difficult task to get at him, or to rescue him from his dreadful situation, while his wild and frantic cries, as he appeared at the iron-barred window of the room, and where a frightful death seemed inevitably to await him, were truly heart-rending to listen to.

It was at that fearful moment that the distracted Phoebe and her friends and companions arrived at the scene of the awful calamity, and it would almost be impossible properly to describe the feelings of horror and anguish under which the poor girl suffered, especially when she beheld the critical and almost hopeless situation of her unfortunate parent. With a loud shriek she sprang out of the cart, and it was with the greatest difficulty she could be prevented from madly rushing through the flames to reach him, and with the vain hope that she could rescue the poor old man.

"God of Heaven!" she exclaimed, wringing her hands in despair, as the flames more fiercely mounted towards the place where he was, spreading destruction around, "will no one attempt to save the poor old man? Father, unfortunate father, must you be suffered to perish thus?"

Greatly did every one commiserate the agonised girl, and their exertions were redoubled, though the great difficulty was in obtaining anything like a sufficient supply of water, and it was quite certain that the building was doomed to entire destruction.

It was a moment of terrible suspense, and all eyes were fixed upon the poor old man, who still remained in the same fearful and dangerous position at the window, notwithstanding that the heat must be intolerable, and the smoke almost suffocating.

To rescue him that way was impossible, for the iron bars sufficiently precluded all hope of that. But ladders having now been procured and placed at the back of the building, two resolute men ascended, and entered by one of the unbarred windows of an upper room, which the flames had not yet reached, and at the imminent risk of their own lives, they forced their way through smoke and fire to the room in which old Mark was.

The excitement became more intense every instant, and the agony and terrible suspense of our heroine and Amy Ashford were so great that it was almost beyond endurance.

A loud shout from the crowd at that moment rent the air, when it was discovered that the two intrepid men had succeeded in reaching the room in which the old man was, and Phoebe and her fair companion sunk upon their knees, and clasped their hands vehemently together, though they

were to much agitated to give expression to their feelings in words.

Yet there was much to apprehend, for the flames had now reached the room by which the men had entered the building, so that it was impossible to return that way, and the chance of escape seemed to be by the roof, which the ladder was fortunately long enough to reach.

Another minute, and the men with Mark having disappeared, were seen upon the roof; but they had a difficult task to descend from such a height with the unfortunate lunatic, and they were watched with the most breathless anxiety, the persons below rendering all the assistance they could.

It was, however, accomplished; they all reached the ground in safety, and Phoebe, with a wild cry of gratitude, and calling upon his name, rushed forward and sunk on her knees before her father, looking up in his pale face with an expression which no language could describe. But he only stared at her vacantly for a minute or two, then burst into a fit of delirious laughter, and, overpowered by her emotions and the terrible excitement she had undergone, sunk insensible in the arms of Amy, who was scarcely less agitated than herself.

The next moment the roof of the building fell in with a fearful crash, and the flames and sparks, and dense volumes of smoke shot up into the sky, and illuminated the country for miles around.

Phoebe soon revived, and then found that her father had been placed in the cart by Mr. Stubbles and his companions, he proposing that the old man should be conveyed to his residence, where he could be much better accommodated than he possibly could at the cottage of Amy Ashford.

To this our heroine assented, especially as Mark seemed pleased with his present situation, and laughed wildly, and in high glee, but without appearing to have the least recollection of his daughter, and in fact taking but little or no notice of her or Amy.

With what mingled feelings of sorrow, fear, doubt and anxiety did Phoebe watch the poor old man as they proceeded on their way, and how grateful did she feel to Heaven for his preservation from the awful fate with which he had been threatened.

The keeper of the old man had offered to follow to the house of Mr. Stubbles in order that he might see to the safety of Mark, and be in attendance upon him, and this was willingly and thankfully accepted by Phoebe, who fully appreciated the value of his services, especially under the peculiar circumstances.

They soon arrived at the house, where the keeper soon after made his appearance,

and every arrangement having been promptly made, Mark was placed in a comfortable room, where he was left entirely in the custody of the keeper, to whom he seemed much attached; and Phoebe and Amy after having passed a short time in the company of the worthy Mr. Stubbles and his wife, and the former having repeatedly thanked them for their kindness, left the house, and proceeded on their return to the cottage.

CHAPTER LII.

THE MANIAC AND HIS CHILD.

The excitement and emotion caused by the startling events of the evening in the mind of our heroine may be easily imagined, and for some time her mind and that of Amy was too busily occupied by the thoughts to which they gave rise to suffer them to retire to rest.

But what was likely to be the result of this event, Phoebe reflected. Would the change in her unfortunate father's situation have a favourable effect, and bring about at length the realisation of her anxious hopes and wishes, by once more restoring him to his senses, and effecting a reconciliation between them? She dared scarcely to encourage the thought. His fatal malady seemed fixed, and when she remembered the disgust and even hatred with which in his more sane moments he had seemed to view her, she could not but abandon herself to despair and continue to entertain the most dismal forebodings.

"Alas, I am very wretched," she sighed, on their return to the cottage, and after she had been for some time buried in these gloomy thoughts, "notwithstanding my heart overflows with gratitude to heaven for my poor afflicted father's preservation from the dreadful fate with which he was threatened, I feel miserable and hopeless. Oh, what would I not give to see him again restored to reason, and to hear his lips pronounce his forgiveness of that fatal error for which I have been so severely punished, and which I so sincerely repent? What atonement is there that I would not gladly make? But I cannot look forward with confidence to such a consummation. Never more can I hope to see that aged parent recovered from his fearful malady, or to be reinstated in those paternal affections he once so fondly lavished upon me."

"Say not so, Phoebe," returned her companion, in gentle soothing accents; "give not way to such gloomy thoughts, but try to take the brightest view of the future. I can-

not but hope, that, in spite of his present deplorable condition, with care and attention he will yet recover, and that with returning reason, he will be but too happy to forgive you, and receive you once more to his heart."

Phoebe shook her head mournfully, as she replied:—

"Oh, would that I could think so, all that I have suffered, all the sorrows of the past would then appear trifling, and I could be content, and even comparatively happy. But when I think of all that has taken place since my return to my native place, and recal to my memory his fearful observations on each occasion that we have met, a nameless feeling of horror steals over me, and my mind becomes distracted. Oh, God! how terrible are the penalties that vice entails upon its unhappy misguided votaries. Would that I could recal the guilty past, but alas! 'tis all in vain."

"Dear Phoebe," again remonstrated Amy, "forbear thus severely and unjustly to reproach yourself, as if you were one of the greatest of criminals. On him who so heartlessly deceived you, and took advantage of your youth and inexperience must rest all blame and odium. But even he I cannot but think is truly penitent. I should be uncharitable could I believe otherwise, when I recollect the anguish and remorse he evinced when he visited me in my wretched dwelling after your mysterious disappearance on the fatal night that my brother was forced away by the press gang in London."

"Name him not," said Phoebe, with a shudder, "for I cannot think of him who has been the guilty cause of all my misfortunes, who wrought my shame and misery, and then abandoned me to all the horrors of despair, with any other emotions but those of disgust and abhorrence. Would that I could banish his image from my memory for ever."

She sighed deeply as she thus gave utterance to her feelings, and tears started to her eyes at the melancholy, the torturing recollections these reflections revived. Amy saw the anguish it caused her, and she therefore endeavoured to soothe her, and to divert her mind from the painful subject.

After some further conversation of a similar melancholy description, as the hour was late, they retired to rest, though it was some time ere the busy and gloomy thoughts that engrossed our heroine's mind would allow her to sleep, and many were the fervent prayers she offered up to heaven for her unfortunate father, anxiously awaiting the arrival of the morning, when she should see him again, although she could not, under all the painful circumstances, but anticipate

the meeting with a feeling of dread which she was unable to conquer.

She shuddered when she recalled to her memory all the circumstances of the conflagration, and the perilous situation in which her father had been placed, and again her heart swelled with gratitude to heaven for his all but miraculous preservation.

The morning came, and with it (just before our heroine and Amy were preparing to go to the house) Mr. Stubbles, who to the anxious inquiries of Phoebe replied that her father had passed a more tranquil night than might have been expected, after the scene of horror and excitement to which he had been exposed.

"The poor old man seems to have some slight recollection of me, Miss Phoebe," remarked Mr. Stubbles, "and I think he is pleased with his new residence. The keeper, however, requested me to advise you not to see him again for a day or two, during which time he says some favourable change may have taken place, and the gratification of your wishes will be the more likely to be crowned with success."

Amy expressed herself entirely of the same opinion, the more especially as she was satisfied that every attention would be paid to him; but Phoebe could not bring her mind to assent, although she admitted the prudence and propriety of the suggestion, so anxious was she once more to behold her unfortunate parent, and to endeavour to arouse his wandering reason, and thanking the warm-hearted Mr. Stubbles for his kindness and good intentions, after partaking of a slight repast, her and Amy accompanied him to the Hall, the dignified name by which Mr. Stubbles called his new residence.

Such was the impatience of Phoebe to behold again the unfortunate sufferer, that she requested Mr. Stubbles to conduct her at once to the chamber which had been set apart for the accommodation of the poor old man, but on her arrival at the door her courage failed her, when she heard his wild laugh, and which having subsided, a brief pause ensued, when he commenced, in low and plaintive tones at first, singing his favourite old country ditty of happy days, gradually swelling it into that hearty pitch of hilarity with which he had been accustomed to sing it, and when he had got to the conclusion of it, again laughing boisterously.

The heart of our heroine beat quick with the power of her emotions, and she was compelled to lean upon the arm of Amy for support, and who was almost as deeply affected as her.

"Oh, God!" exclaimed Phoebe, "how agonising is this. Unfortunate father, will you never more recover from this frightful,

this fatal malady? Heaven look down with mercy upon you."

"Ah, poor old man," said Mr. Stubbles, compassionately; "it is indeed melancholy to hear him singing his old ditty as merrily as he used to do on his return from his daily labour. Ah! Phoebe, though his lot was humble, those were happy and contented days to him."

"For mercy's sake cease, my friend," said the agitated girl, tears trembling in her eyes; "your observations torture me."

"Pardon me, miss," returned Stubbles, "I'm sure I did not wish to hurt your feelings. But, if you will take my advice, you will not attempt to see your poor father at present."

Our heroine shook her head.

"Well miss," remarked Stubbles, "you know best. The keeper is now with him, in fact he has never left him for a minute since he came here, and had you not better, at any rate, see him first before you have the melancholy interview?"

To this Phoebe agreed, and Stubbles having knocked at the door, the keeper made his appearance.

"It would have been much better and more prudent, miss," he observed, "had you deferred this visit for a day or two. But of course I can make every allowance for your anxiety. See, he is quiet now, and it is almost a pity to disturb him."

With a trembling yet cautious step, Phoebe walked to the door, followed by Amy, and looked in at the unfortunate man.

He was seated in one corner of the room, his elbows on his knees, and his chin resting on his hands as though he was wrapped in thought. The expression of his features was calm but melancholy, and his eyes rested on vacancy. But ever and anon his lips moved, and he seemed to be muttering to himself, though no sound could be heard to escape from him.

Suddenly, however, he started, as if aroused from some dream, and his eyes glancing towards the door, immediately rested on his daughter, and with a wild sort of cry of mingled surprise, pleasure, and anger, he advanced hastily, and before the keeper could interpose, seized her hand, and forced her into the room.

Phoebe sunk on her knees, overpowered by her emotions, and her wretched parent still retaining his hold of her hand, while Amy remained outside with Mr. Stubbles, and the keeper stood by without interfering, though ready to act in a moment should his services be required.

There was a dead pause of several minutes, and the heart of Phoebe throbbed violently with mingled hope, fear, and expectation,

while her father gazed earnestly in her face as though he was endeavouring to recall her features to his memory.

But at length he burst into a loud, idiotic laugh, and casting her hand rudely away, he retreated a few paces, and then in a voice, every tone of which thrilled to her heart, and inspired her with feelings of the most inexpressible anguish, he exclaimed:—

"Again, again thou art here, to strike the o'd man's breast wi' horror, and disgust his eyes wi' the presence o' one so hated, so fallen. Away, wretch, there be a curse where'er thou comest, it is thou who have turned this poor brain, and now come to mock my sufferings, and laugh at my frenzy! Wanton, hypocrite! begone!"

"Oh, God!" groaned the distracted girl, still continuing on her knees, and covering her face with her hands.

"Tak' her away!" cried the unfortunate man, fiercely, clenching his fists and again advancing in a menacing attitude towards her; "why do you suffer the accursed one to annoy me? Do you not know that I am mad, and that 'tis she who has made me so? Away wi' her, I say, lest in the frenzy of my wrath I strike her a corpse at my feet!"

It was now necessary for the keeper to interpose, and the unhappy man being secured to prevent his doing any mischief, Phoebe almost in a state of insensibility, and with a heart bursting with the agony of grief and despair, was led from the room; the wild ravings of her unfortunate parent continuing to ring in her ears, until she reached the sitting-room which was far away from the chamber which he occupied.

How shall we attempt to describe the feelings of the poor girl at this terrible scene and disappointment to her hopes? She saw at once that the malady of her ill-fated father was fixed, and the terrible observations that in his madness he had given utterance to, had left a painful impression on her mind that nothing could eradicate.

Amy was greatly shocked by what she had witnessed, and she was at a loss how to endeavour to impart consolation to her under such afflicting circumstances. The medical attendant of the late lunatic asylum, it was found necessary to send for without delay, such was the state of fearful excitement in which poor old Mark continued, and he could not help blaming out heroine greatly for having sought an interview with him at present, which could not fail to be productive of the most painful and unfortunate consequences, and he strictly prohibited a repetition of the same, until such time as he could see that it might be done with safety, promising that everything should be done that might tend towards his ultimate recovery,

though he could not conceal his belief that such a result was extremely doubtful.

Mr. Stubbles also promised that every care and attention that humanity could suggest, should be paid to him while he continued at his house, and with these assurances Phoebe was compelled to appear satisfied and comforted, although her mental sufferings may readily be imagined, for all hope seemed to be now at an end, and Amy, who felt for her the deep anxiety and affectionate commiseration of a sister, knew not what to advise or say to her in order to ameliorate her sufferings.

With an aching heart Phoebe left the dwelling of Mr. Stubbles, accompanied by Amy, and dreadful were the forebodings that distracted her bosom, as they slowly proceeded on their way to the cottage.

"Alas, alas!" she sighed, "all my worst fears are realised; and I feel myself a wretched being, accursed, loathed, and despised. Even in his madness my unhappy parent evidently recognised me, and looked upon me with that horror, disgust, and detestation which can never be banished from his disordered brain. Heaven have mercy upon me, for most poignant do I feel the utter misery and horror of my situation."

"Would that I could persuade you to think differently, dear Phoebe," said her companion, "and to still view the circumstances of your fate through a less gloomy medium."

"It is impossible for me to do so," returned our heroine; "for do not my prospects every day appear the more cheerless, the more hopeless? What can possibly tend to soothe the anguish of my mind?"

Amy knew not what to reply, and they shortly afterwards arrived at the cottage.

A week elapsed after this event, and no favourable change took place in the unfortunate Mark Mayfield; he continued extremely violent at times, so much so indeed, that it was found necessary to call in the assistance of another keeper, and the prospect of his recovery was far more distant than ever.

Phoebe's health greatly declined from the constant and dreadful anxiety of mind that she was compelled to endure, and at length she became so bad that she was unable to leave her chamber, and Amy, who watched over and attended to her with even more than a sister's regard, could not but entertain the most serious apprehensions as to the result.

The kindness of Mr. Stubbles in affording an asylum in his house to the unfortunate lunatic, and sparing no expense which was necessary in his deplorable case, continued unremitting, and excited the admiration of all who were acquainted with the facts. In short, there was nothing left undone which humanity could suggest, but with little

chance of success, and the melancholy situation of poor old Mark Mayfield and his daughter excited universal sympathy.

CHAPTER LIII.

BEAUFORT'S ADVENTURE.

It has been stated in a previous chapter that the manner in which the fellow Beaufort had managed to effect his escape from the Invulnerable, was a complete mystery to all on board, and that mystery at present, we are quite unable to solve; we will content ourselves by pursuing the wanderings and adventures of the villain on the island where he had encountered Henry Ashford, and from whom he had so narrow an escape.

His situation and future prospects were as gloomy and wretched as could well be imagined, and although he had for a time escaped the punishment with which he with his ruffianly companions was threatened while a prisoner on board the Invulnerable, the change in his condition could not be considered much for the better. He was on an unknown island, wet, barefooted, and half naked—having been compelled to swim from the ship ashore—hungry, and destitute of the means of procuring food, unless he should happen to meet with some friendly inhabitants, who would supply his wants, which to all appearances at present, he was not likely to do, and if Providence did not send him some relief before long, and, concealing his real character, he should be able to get on board some other vessel, there was nothing but the certainty of a miserable fate before his eyes.

These not very cheering thoughts occurred to him after eluding the pursuit of the men from the Invulnerable, and his narrow escape from the contents of the pistol which Henry had discharged at him, and his courage began to fail him, especially as the further he penetrated into the island, the more wild and desolate did it appear to be, and the more limited became the prospects of his relief.

The moon had now entirely disappeared, and the darkness became intense and almost impenetrable, while the wind arose, and presently blew tempestuously, benumbing his thinly clad limbs, and adding to the utter misery of his situation.

At length feeling weary from the exertion he had already undergone, having reached a spot which was enclosed by trees, whose thickly intertwining branches, formed a canopy over his head which somewhat sheltered him from the wind, he threw himself upon the earth, and gave way to the dismal

thoughts that crowded upon his guilty mind.

"So," he soliloquized, "to this wretched state is the once fashionable Captain Beaufort at last reduced. Fate for some time has conspired against me, and I begin to think that the dice of Fortune are not likely to turn up again in my favour. With all my fancied craft and sagacity, I have played my game badly, and now experience the consequences. What has such a poor outcast, friendless wretch as I am to do with life? And yet," he added, with a shudder, "I shrink from the thought of death with a feeling of dread, nay, of horror, which I cannot conquer. Psha! what a weak, cowardly fool have I become. I will not yield to these dismal thoughts, but still endeavour to look forward to a change for the better. Could I succeed in reaching England again, and meeting with any of my old associates, I might yet by some bold act be enabled to redeem my broken fortune, and to commence a new career, that is, if I could only contrive to keep out of the clutches of the law. I wonder whether my old friend Lord Selborne is still living, and Phoebe Mayfield, too, who imagined that she was made the victim of his guilt and treachery. She could little suspect the secret that is locked within my breast, and in which she was so deeply interested, unless indeed it has been divulged to her through the means of those papers that were found in my coat-pocket. I must, I will struggle against the vicissitudes of my present fate, and can I but succeed in returning to England, I will make another desperate attempt to regain a position in the world."

With these ideas and anticipations, wild and delusive as they were, the villain sought to console himself, and then tried to obtain an hour or two's rest, which, being exhausted, he at length succeeded in doing, notwithstanding the howling of the wind around, and that his limbs shivered with the cold.

He was at length aroused, however, by the increased severity and inclemency of the weather, a storm having come on, and to increase the wretched plight in which he had before found himself, the rain came down in torrents.

He felt a gnawing hunger upon him that was quite intolerable, and half mad with the thoughts that crowded upon him, and the fears that beset him, he gave utterance to his feelings in the coarsest language, and racked his brain to no purpose to consider what to do.

"Curses light upon my impetuosity," he said! "I had much better have remained on board the Invulnerable, and braved my fate than to expose myself to such sufferings as these. But then to die the death of a dog,

to which myself and my companions would doubtless have been condemned—the thought is revolting, and I must endeavour to reanimate my failing resolution. Could I but succeed in meeting with some human habitation, I might find both shelter and relief; but to remain here inactive, and uselessly grumbling, is little short of madness."

But still when he looked around him, at least as far as his eyes could penetrate through the darkness, his hopes almost vanished, for nothing could possibly be more dreary and desolate than the scene.

Through the storm, however, the wretched man at length forced his way, but muttering curses as he proceeded, and his situation every moment became more desperate.

The storm increased in violence, and the vivid flashes of lightning that preceded the rapid peals of thunder, gave an intensity of horror to the scene that was truly appalling.

Beaufort felt his strength gradually failing him; and now coward fear, at the prospect of meeting before long—without some relief presented itself—with a frightful death, completely superseeded every other feeling in his guilty breast. However, he exerted himself to the utmost, and with difficulty dragged his weary limbs along to some little distance further; when looking anxiously before him, and ready to drop with fatigue—while a more wretched looking object could not possibly be—he beheld by a blaze of lightning, a small hollow or opening in the side of a hill, which was just large enough to admit the body of a man, and which at any rate would afford him a temporary shelter from the greater violence of the storm.

Into this den, then, Beaufort crawled, and found it of greater extent than he had at first imagined, and stretching his limbs as well as he could upon the earth, he quickly sunk into a kind of stupor, for it could scarcely be called sleep, the storm continuing to rage with unabated fury, but failing to arouse him.

Morning was just breaking through the black clouds of night, when Beaufort again awoke to consciousness—shivering with cold—and stared around in stupefied amazement, not remembering for the moment where he was, or how he had come there; but thirst and hunger, which were intense upon him, soon brought all the facts to his recollection, and his thoughts were of the most gloomy and desponding nature.

The storm had ceased, but the wind still continued to howl in fitful gusts around, and blew piercingly cold. Beaufort crawled out of his strange place of shelter, and anxiously gazed at the prospect before him; but as far as his eyes could stretch he could not per-

ceive any signs of a human dwelling, which led him to suppose that the island was uninhabited, and if so his case was indeed almost hopeless.

The rain which had fallen in the night had formed several small pools in the earth, and Beaufort eagerly quenched his burning thirst, which somewhat revived him, and he then found some wild fruits, with which in a measure he appeased his hunger, and thought he had never eaten anything more delicious in his life.

But still when he gazed at the dreary scene, his brain became bewildered, and he was at a loss what course to adopt.

The prospect was wild in the extreme, bounded by a chain of hills to the right, and to the left by large rocks which Beaufort had no doubt, overhung and stretched themselves into the sea.

He gathered some more of the wild fruit, and then slowly bent his way to the rocks, in order that he might watch the approach of some vessel, by which by telling some plausible story of his being wrecked, he might obtain his deliverance from his perilous situation, and escape the fate which he so justly merited.

After walking for some time, he gained one of the rocks before mentioned, which he ascended, and seating himself upon a prominent point of it, he gazed with anxious eyes across the broad waters of the ocean, which stretched themselves to a boundless extent before him; but without beholding anything to gratify his hopes or wishes,

For hours the wretched and guilty man remained seated in this manner as if transfixed to the spot, but only the vast expanse of sky and ocean met his sight, and a feeling of despair fell upon his heart, reducing him to the most abject state of misery, but at length hunger compelled him to go again in search of something to allay the cravings of his appetite, sharpened by the keen air, and he was fortunate enough to find among the rocks several small shell fish, which he devoured voraciously.

Night again approached without any prospect of relief, and Beaufort with a heavy heart returned to the small cavern in which he had before found a shelter, with the determination to resume his dreary watching on the rock, at daylight.

The night passed away in much the same manner as the previous one and another miserable day dawned upon Beaufort. Again he took his seat upon the rocks, and strained his eyes until they were completely blood-shot across the deep, but for hours without observing anything to realize his wishes.

At length, however, he fancied that he beheld the white sails of a vessel upon the

horizon, but so distant, that he could not quite satisfy himself that his surmises were correct. But after watching for a short time, he was convinced that he was not mistaken, and starting to his feet, he shouted aloud, as though his voice could possibly reach the ears of the persons on board the ship from such a distance.

The vessel, however, was evidently sailing rapidly before the wind, in the direction of the rocks, and unless she changed her course she would probably arrive so near that he could make himself observed, and they might exert themselves for his deliverance, and this thought had such an effect upon him, that he laughed, shouted, and clapped his hands in the delirium of his joy.

But he scarcely once removed his eyes from the ship, which every minute became more distinct, and increased his hopes and expectations.

He continued standing at the extreme point of the rock, and taking his kerchief from his neck, he waved it in the air, still shouting at the top of his voice.

In this manner more than an hour elapsed, one of the most painful suspense that Beaufort had ever experienced; but at last the ship approached so near that it was evident those on board, from the position in which he stood must observe him, and that supposition was presently confirmed, for Beaufort, to his unspeakable relief, beheld a boat lowered, which put off from the vessel, in the direction of the island, although there was still some difficulty, as it would not be safe for the boat to approach too near.

However, Beaufort hesitated not a moment as to what he should do, but with great labour descended the rock, till he got so near the sea, that he could boldly venture to commit himself to the waves, when the boat should approach nearer, and as he was an excellent swimmer, he had very little doubt that he should be able to reach it in safety.

On rapidly came the boat, which contained three apparently English seamen, until it had got within hail, and Beaufort, unable any longer to restrain his impatience, leaped from the place on which he had been standing on the rock, into the sea, and after he had recovered and extricated himself from the surf, which was a task of no little difficulty, and which under different circumstances he probably could not have accomplished, he struck out manfully, till a rope was thrown to him from the boat, which he seized, and with this assistance was rescued from the danger which had been impending over him; but no sooner had he been hauled into the boat, than completely exhausted, and overpowered by the excitement of his feelings he became insensible.



The ship proved to be an English merchantman, homeward bound, and Beaufort was received with every feeling of humanity and sympathy on board, no suspicion being entertained of his real character, but on the contrary, it being supposed that he was some unfortunate shipwrecked mariner, which his appearance, and the situation in which he was found denoted him to be; and in that character Beaufort represented himself, on his restoration to his senses, stating that the vessel to which he had belonged was wrecked off that coast in a fearful storm more than a week previously, on her passage to America, and that all but himself on board the unfortunate ship had perished.

The story that he told was such a plausible one, that no one doubted the truth of it, and thus Beaufort found himself for the present

secure, and exulted in his triumph over the perils and dangers to which for some time previously he had been exposed, although his prospects on arriving in England, unless something unexpected turned up in his favour, were none of the brightest.

No one knew better, from long experience, than Beaufort, how to play the hypocrite, and by that means he soon ingratiated himself in the favour of the captain and crew; and being always ready to render any assistance when his services were required on deck, and which duties he performed skilfully, he was considered to be not only a worthy fellow, but a good seaman, and thus succeeded completely in disguising his real character.

The vessel proceeded on its way for several days with favourable weather, and without

anything particular or worthy of recording occurring, and Beaufort having completely recovered from the sufferings to which he had recently been exposed, began to look forward to his return to England with the most sanguine hopes and expectations, and to arrange his plans of villany for the future.

What those plans were may be easily conjectured, knowing the desperate character of his circumstances. He had not the means or the will to pursue a life of honesty and industry; his character was blasted for ever, he had long been ruined by extravagance and dissipation past redemption, he bore the brand of a convicted felon and escaped transport on his brow, and therefore there was nothing left to him but a life of plunder, which he determined to enter upon with the most reckless daring, let the consequences be whatever they might.

"Why should I hesitate," he reflected; "why should I, who so long have been inured to crime, and plunged so deeply into it, now shrink from the perpetration of it? It is for poor, weak, drivelling fools to feel compunction; I have no remorse of conscience, and am therefore fully prepared for anything, however desperate and atrocious it may be.

"Villain!" exclaimed a voice near him, and at the time of that voice, so familiar to his ears, and alarmed at having betrayed himself to any one on board, he started, and turning round, he beheld retiring hastily, and with his face averted, evidently with the wish to conceal his features, the tall and commanding form of a man enveloped in a military cloak, and whom he had never observed on board before.

Excited by his fears that the stranger should reveal what he had overheard—for he had no doubt that he had been listening to the whole of his guilty soliloquy—Beaufort sprang forward quickly, and grasping him rudely by the arm arrested him in his retreat, at the same time demanding in a stern voice who he was, and for what purpose he had turned spy upon him?

"Has he who was once Captain Beaufort, the courage to meet my answer?" replied the man, still averting his face, and angrily releasing himself from Beaufort's hold.

"Ah!" exclaimed the latter, with the most indescribable astonishment and agitation; "that voice!—can I believe the evidence of my ears, or is it some strange delusion?"

"Behold!" said the man, turning round, and removing his hat from his brow, fully revealing his features.

"Lord Selborne, by all that is wonderful!" cried Beaufort, starting back a few

paces, and staring at him for several minutes with a look of the utmost wonderment and incredulity.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE SHIP ON FIRE.—THE SCENE OF HORROR.

Yes, it was indeed Lord Selborne, whom the villain Beaufort, his former pretended friend and associate, had thus so strangely and so unexpectedly encountered after the lapse of so long a period; but so altered was his appearance, so pale and careworn his looks, that he might have passed unrecognised by any one who was not so intimately acquainted with him as Beaufort.

And terrible indeed had been his mental sufferings, the pangs of remorse he had endured, especially since that evening when he had met the unfortunate Mark Mayfield. Struck with a feeling of terror, a sensation of dread which it is not easy to describe, and despairing, nay, almost fearing to learn the fate of our heroine, he returned to London without delay, and no sooner had he arrived there than he was seized with a serious illness, which for some time placed his life in the most imminent danger, and when he was restored to anything like convalescence, his spirits were completely broken; he lost all taste for every pleasure and enjoyment, and secluded himself from all society. In fact, there were times when he was in a state almost bordering upon madness, and his friends entertained the most alarming apprehensions as to the result.

Phoebe, the unfortunate Phoebe, whom he had so deeply wronged, was ever present to his thoughts, and he would willingly have resigned title, fortune, everything to recal the past, to discover and receive the forgiveness of his innocent victim, and restore her to that enviable state of happiness she once enjoyed, and which he had so heartlessly, so recklessly destroyed. It was strange that all his endeavours to discover her had been in vain, and it seemed as if Fate was against him, and he could not but abandon himself to the deepest despair.

About this time, circumstances of the most important and extraordinary nature, which it may not be necessary here to describe, called for his presence in the United States, and he was compelled to depart from England without delay.

Having settled the business for which he had gone there, and disliking the country and the manners of the people, he took the earliest opportunity to return, and that brought him on board the ship where it has

been shown that he so singularly encountered the villain Beaufort, who had been the principal cause of most of his greatest vices.

He was confined to his cabin by illness when Beaufort was first brought on board, and that accounted for their not having met before.

The astonishment of Selborne on beholding the villain may be readily imagined. His back was towards him at the time, but he immediately recognised the tones of his voice, and the observations he made use of convinced him that he could not be mistaken; and although he would gladly have retired without being seen by him, in the excitement of the moment he could not help giving utterance to the exclamation which betrayed him.

"So then," said Beaufort, with an ironical smile, "old friends and companions meet again. 'Tis well; I have long been anxious to see you, my lord, but little expected that we should meet again under such singular circumstances as these."

"Villain!" repeated his lordship, with a look of disgust; "dare you, the most abandoned and guilty of men, whom I have such reason to loathe and despise, thus boldly address me? Oh, would to Heaven that we had never known each other; what shame, what misery, what remorse would it have saved me."

"Humph!" exclaimed Beaufort, folding his arms, and gazing at the nobleman with a mingled look of exultation and contempt; "so, my lord, the voice of conscience tells you that you have not always been immaculate, and you are pleased to give me the credit of having been your tutor. Be it so, I do not disclaim the honour, although I have not gained much by it. Fortune has for some time forsaken me, but I hope once more to see her smiles, now that we have met."

"Daring scoundrel!" returned Lord Selborne, indignantly.

"Better language, my lord," said Beaufort, coolly; "you seem to have forgotten that I am by birth a gentleman, and one whom you once felt proud to acknowledge as your friend. However, hark you, my lord, although I am most happy to renew your acquaintance—for I have yet some important business to transact with you, and which immediately concerns you—I have certain reasons for not wishing to be known on board this vessel. You understand me?"

"I do," replied his lordship; "it might not be convenient for it to be known that a convicted thief, an escaped convict, and for all that I know to the contrary, a murderer—"

"Silence!" commanded the ruffian, grasp-

ing his wrist, and glancing hastily and fearfully around to see that no one was listening; "venture not to utter another word like that, or—"

"Why should I hesitate to denounce you?" demanded Selborne.

"You dare not—at your peril, you dare not," replied Beaufort.

"Dare not!"

"No, for it would but recoil on yourself. I have a secret that must secure your silence."

"What mean you?" said his lordship, with a look of curiosity and anxiety.

At that moment the voices of some of the crew as they approached the spot, met their ears.

"Some one comes this way," said Beaufort, in an under tone, "we must not be seen together. We must meet again, for I have that to communicate to you, which it is of the most vital importance for you to know. Remember my words, and beware—know me not."

As Beaufort thus spoke, he fixed upon Lord Selborne a significant look, and then hurried away, leaving him in a state of the utmost astonishment and bewilderment.

He retraced his steps to his cabin, and there gave way to the reflections which this unexpected meeting, and the observations of the villain, naturally gave rise to in his mind.

The sight of Beaufort recalled more vividly to the memory of the unhappy nobleman, all the guilty circumstances of the past, and added to the bitter pangs of remorse which constantly racked and distracted him.

He could not but look upon one whom he knew to be capable of any act of villany, however daring and atrocious, and who had been the principal cause of all his errors—if, indeed, he could call them by so mild a term—without a feeling of dread as well as disgust; and the dark hints, insinuations, and threats he had held out, were not at all calculated to quiet those apprehensions. To be sure, he might at once get rid of the fellow by denouncing him, but he shrunk from the thought of the exposure of himself which that would be sure to lead to, and particularly the disgrace of having been once the friend and associate of such a consummate scoundrel, with terror, and he could not but acknowledge to himself that he was in his power to a certain extent, and must submit to the extortionate demands which he doubtless would make, in order to purchase his silence.

It was a degrading position to be placed in, and he felt it keenly, but at present he could see no means of extricating himself from it.

He paced his cabin to and fro with disordered steps, as these torturing thoughts occurred to him, and for some time in vain sought to calm the agitation and excitement of his feelings.

"Such are the consequences that are ever sure to follow vices such as those I have been guilty of," he soliloquised; "and I am justly, though severely punished. I never felt my own shame and debasement more keenly than I do at this moment. Conscience tells me that much as I may affect to loathe and despise this man, I have been almost as great a villain as himself, and that should my former guilty conduct become known to the world, I should equally have to meet its disgust and execration. I could not shelter myself behind my title and station; they would not screen me from the just reprobation and contempt of all honourable men, who would shun me as one who had rendered himself unworthy of the society of any but the most degraded and abandoned. I dare not meet the exposure. Accursed fate that should ever have introduced me to such a guilty wretch, and rendered me so weak as to be led by him from those paths of rectitude and honour it was once my intention and anxiety to pursue. But it is now too late to repent. I feel that there is no atonement which I can make for the numerous vices, nay, the crimes that I have committed."

Again he paced the cabin in the most disordered manner, and abandoned himself to all the agitation of his feelings.

"How terrible is the retrospection of the past," he said, after a pause, "oh, how agonising, how overwhelming are the thoughts that crowd upon my distracted brain. Poor, innocent, and confiding Phoebe, how happy might I now have been in your love, had my conduct towards you been virtuous and honourable. Heartless villain that I was to deceive one so good, so gentle, so affectionate. How fearful have been the consequences of my guilt; her poor old mother brought to an untimely grave, their once happy home made desolate, her aged father rendered lonely and bereft of reason, and my unfortunate victim, oh, where is she? What is her awful fate? Distracting thought! I shall go mad! I shall go mad!"

He struck his forehead with his clenched fist as he thus spoke, and the expression of his features, and his whole demeanour showed his utter agony and despair.

"But," he observed, when his excitement had in some degree abated, "hopeless though the task may be, I will not yet abandon my endeavours to discover her, if indeed she be still living, and offer her all the atonement it is in my power to make. But dare I again meet her whom I have so cruelly, so irrepar-

ably injured? Would she not scorn my protestations of repentance, meet me with loathing and disgust, and load me with her curses and execrations? She would, she must, and I should shrink appalled and tremble in her presence! She would point to the grave of her mother, she would remind me that it was my guilty conduct that broke the poor old woman's heart, that I, yes, I indeed am her murderer; and could I rebut the dreadful charge? No, no, I could not; the fearful voice of conscience would denounce me should I attempt to do so, and I should stand before her a self-convicted villain of the deepest dye. Oh, agony supreme! Whither can I turn to find the least ray of hope and consolation."

He threw himself on a seat, overpowered by his emotions, and covering his face with his hands, became lost in gloomy silence, save the heart-drawn sighs of anguish that frequently escaped his lips.

But the last words of Beaufort, in which he alluded to what he called an important secret, suddenly recurred forcibly to his memory, and filled his mind with various and bewildering suspicions and conjectures. What ever could that secret be? What did it involve? And did it really concern him, as Beaufort had declared it did? Or was it merely some guilty device to further the villain's schemes, and intimidate him into a compliance with whatever insolent and extravagant demands he might think proper to make? Lord Selborne was half inclined to believe the latter to be the fact, and yet he could not help feeling curious and anxious to hear what Beaufort had stated so positively it was in his power to divulge. At any rate, for the present, fearing as his lordship did, exposure, he felt himself at the mercy of Beaufort, and that, till an opportunity should present itself for him to escape from his trammels, he had no alternative but to submit, though it was most mortifying to his pride, and repulsive to his feelings to be compelled to do so.

In this state of mind the wretched nobleman continued throughout the day, and kept himself confined to the cabin, fearful that if he ventured on deck he might again encounter Beaufort, which in his present agitation he was anxious to avoid doing.

The meeting with Lord Selborne, as may be imagined, was a source of infinite satisfaction and exultation to the villain Beaufort, and he was determined to take every advantage of the opportunity which was thus afforded him of carrying out the nefarious designs he had long had in contemplation, should he ever again encounter his lordship, though it was necessary that he should use the utmost precaution in doing so, lest he should betray

himself. He was well aware of the fear which the unhappy lord had of exposure, and so far he entertained the most sanguine hopes of success, but at the same time he knew that it would require all his ingenuity to carry out his schemes to the full extent he wished, and that the least false step on his part might involve him in ruin.

"Yes," said the villain to himself, after he had left his lordship, "I must indeed be cautious, and if I play my cards rightly, I have no cause to fear the result. Once more Fortune seems inclined to smile upon me. This unexpected meeting is most lucky. I will so work upon his fears and his credulity, that he will be compelled to yield to my extortionate demands. I will again have money, and then disguised so as to defy detection, I can retire on the continent, and commence a new career of pleasure. Bright prospects open before me, and I begin to feel myself a man again. I have been long tossed about on the sea of misfortune, but thanks to my lucky stars, I have not foundered yet, and it shall not be my fault if I do not triumph over every difficulty, and finally escape the hands of justice."

Such were the guilty thoughts that now occupied the busy mind of Beaufort, and he was determined to adopt any means, consistent with his own safety, to carry his designs into effect.

"I ever found him an easy dupe," he resumed, after a pause, "and I have a double advantage now, since I can so work upon his fears as to compel him to yield to my demands, however repulsive to his feelings they may be. He threatened to denounce me, but he dare not, and I therefore laugh all such empty threats to scorn. The secret I have to divulge will startle him, and I will not fail to exaggerate the facts so as to make the strongest impression upon him, and render him the more subservient to my wishes. It was cursed unfortunate, however, that I lost those papers which could have proved my assertions beyond a doubt, and should they by any means fall into the hands of Phoebe—who I feel convinced is still living—or any of her friends, it would at once be the means of revealing the truth, and rendering my deep laid plans abortive. Psha, I will not encourage any such apprehensions, but proceed cautiously and resolutely."

Determining to watch for the earliest opportunity of another interview with Lord Selborne, and to lose no time in carrying his designs into effect before the vessel should arrive in England, he rejoined the crew.

It was about the time of mid-watch, and there was a dead silence on board, which was

only broken by the murmuring of the waves, as they lashed the sides of the ship.

The weather was calm, but the night was extremely dark, and the ocean was wrapped in gloom, and seemed to roll sluggishly and sullenly on its course.

It was such a night as was calculated to excite ominous forebodings of some approaching calamity, and those who were on the watch, paced the deck with slow and measured paces, and in silence, every now and then casting an anxious look, as far as their eyes could penetrate, over the dark expanse of waters.

Lord Selborne had been so busily occupied with thought, that he had not felt disposed to retire to rest, but at length he was about to do so, when he was startled from his purpose by a loud and confused noise on deck, and the next instant the fearful cries of "fire" from several voices, saluted his ears, and he beheld from his cabin window a broad lurid glare of light, and which left no doubt of the alarming calamity which had commenced, and which threatened the destruction of the ship and all on board.

The wind, too, had arisen unfortunately a few minutes before, which increased the danger, by fanning the fierce flames which were spreading rapidly.

And now the consternation which seemed to prevail on deck, was intense, and Lord Selborne, terrified, rushed from the cabin, and on his reaching the former, the scene that met his sight was of the most awful and alarming description.

The fire it appeared, by what means was unknown, had broken out in the hold of the vessel, and so rapid was its progress, that the flames were already rushing through the deck, and seemed to mock all the exertions of the crew to extinguish them.

A fire at sea—how frightful the calamity, especially when there is no prospect of assistance, which there was none on this occasion, for as far as the eyes could stretch across the ocean, now illuminated by the flames, no signs of a vessel could be seen, and there was nothing but a wide expanse of sea and sky before them.

The shouts of the seamen in their hopeless endeavours to stop the progress of the devouring element, and the shrieks of the women and children—for there were several on board—as they rushed frantically to and fro, were truly appalling, and Lord Selborne lost all fortitude and self-possession at the prospect of the dreadful fate, which seemed inevitably to await all on board.

While he stood completely paralysed, every faculty suspended in horror, his wrist was rudely grasped by some one behind, and looking up, he beheld the savage features of

Beaufort, which were now rendered more repulsive by the rage, terror, and excitement of his feelings.

Before, however, he could give utterance to that which he evidently wished to say, he was hurried away to his duty in assisting the rest of the crew in their arduous exertions, and Lord Selborne lost sight of him.

The vessel was now burning fiercely fore and aft, and the flames had reached the rigging, so that total destruction seemed certain, and so that, in a very short time, so that the only chance of saving themselves from a dreadful fate was to abandon the ill-fated ship, and to take immediately to the boats.

The long boat was first launched, into which Lord Selborne and the other passengers, men, women, and children, together with a part of the crew, were assisted, and immediately pushed off from the scene of horror.

The captain and the rest of the crew then took to the remaining boat, and Beaufort, who by some fatality was left to the last, was about to follow, when the boat was driven by the waves rapidly away, and to his horror he found himself left to perish in the flames, or, probably only to meet with a less frightful death by committing himself to the waves, and endeavouring to swim to one of the boats, which had both by that time, short as it was, got to a considerable distance from the burning ship.

To describe the agony and terror of the wretched guilty man, would be almost impossible, he uttered a frightful yell of despair, and threw his arms above his head in utter frenzy.

But there was not a moment to be lost, the heat was intense and insupportable, and the ship must soon be burnt to the waters' edge. The distracted Beaufort cast one eager look across the ocean towards the fast receding boats, and then plunged desperately among the waves, on which he again quickly arose, and struck out manfully towards one of the broken spars of the vessel, which he perceived floating at a short distance.

He reached it, and clinging convulsively to it, was dashed quickly along at the will of the waves, without being able to make the least exertion himself.

It was indeed a terrible situation for any unfortunate human being to be placed in, and death appeared certain. The boats had got so far that they seemed but as specks in the distance, and a rock which stretched far into the sea in the direction which the waves were hurrying him, seemed to be the only forlorn hope of present safety to the wretched Beaufort. But he was almost exhausted, and it appeared doubtful whether he would be able to hold on till he could gain the rock.

Desperation, however, again aroused him, and he struggled on with a strength that was almost superhuman, and at length arriving near the rock, he released himself from the spar, and swimming with all his might, he gained it, and clambering up it with astonishing and almost incredible dexterity, considering the fearful exertions he had already undergone, he reached a small flat portion of it in safety, and there, completely exhausted, he sunk, powerless and insensible.

CHAPTER LV.

THE SEA FIGHT.

Leaving the unfortunate but guilty Beaufort in the awful and apparently hopeless situation we have described, and deferring the particulars of that which occurred to Lord Selborne and his unfortunate companions, after they had quitted the burning vessel, to a future occasion, we will return to the Invulnerable, which had been engaged in a gallant fight while the events recorded in the preceding chapters were taking place.

For two days after leaving the island, where she had been compelled to put in, and Beaufort had contrived to effect his escape from on board in so extraordinary and mysterious a manner, the noble vessel proceeded on her way without anything particular occurring, and if the weather continued favourable, it was expected that they would in a few more days be able to complete the voyage, and join the fleet.

All on board were in the best of spirits, and animated with the desire to meet the foe, every man being fully prepared to do his duty.

No one could display a more manly or enthusiastic spirit than Henry Ashford, and he was looked upon with pride by his shipmates, and respect and admiration by the captain and other officers, for while he had all the simple and cheerful, hearty bearing, of the true British tar, there was something so superior in his manners to the generality of ordinary seaman, that it could not fail to win him universal esteem.

But in spite of all his buoyancy of spirits, which never seemed to relax, there were times when alone, and often at night whilst swinging in his hammock, that Henry felt very sad and wretched, and certain fears and dismal forebodings would cross his mind, when his thoughts wandered to home, to his beloved Phoebe, and his gentle sister, and the uncertainty as to whether it might be his fate ever to behold them again.

It was again Saturday night at sea, and

the crew were enjoying themselves in the usual manner, while the vessel was merrily steering on its course propelled by favourable winds.

"Come, Harry, my lad," said one of his shipmates, "splice the mainbrace, and then give us that favourite song of your's with which you have enlivened us on so many occasions."

"Ay, ay," joined in several of the others, "the old song, Harry, my hearty, the old song."

Henry needed no further solicitations, but immediately sung the following song in a fine manly voice, the whole of his companions joining heartily in the chorus:—

SONG.

The sea was rough and dark the morn,
When little Jack the tar was born,
Among as brave a British crew,
As ever wore the jacket blue.
Will Block his godfather would be,
For, christened there and then was he;
And loudly shouted ev'ry one,
"Welcome to Jack the sailor's son!"

Jack's father was a seaman brave,
As ever plough'd the dangerous wave;
With heart as staunch as oak could be,
He'd fought and bled for liberty.
And now his only hope was Jack.
He pray'd that courage he ne'er lack,
But prove, as he had ever done,
Worthy of being a British son.

"Bravo, Harry, my young sea lion," here interrupted old Ben Halyard, in the enthusiasm of his feelings, "you're true blue, every inch of you. But sail on, my hearty. That song's worth all the yarns as ever was spun."

Henry laughed good humouredly, and then continued, as follows, his nautical ditty to the conclusion.

Young Jack in health and vigour grew,
E'en when a boy no fear he knew;
No, little Jack was not so soft,
He'd like a sea-bird mount aloft,
No tar on board the ship was there,
Who better could hand, reef, or steer;
And he the name from all had won,
Of "Hardy Jack, the sailor's son!"

And Now brave Nelson led the way,
Into Trafalgar's noble bay;
And ev'ry heart, with valour fired,
To meet the foe alone desired.
Then old Jack Steadfast said "My boy,
This day my hopes do not destroy;
Fight like a man, as I've e'er done,
And prove yourself true Britain's son!"

Old England's prowess need we tell,
That day when gallant Nelson fell?
And foremost in the deadly fight,
Young Jack Steadfast bore in sight.

He bravely fought, but, ah! the foe,
At last laid poor Jack's timber's low;
'Farewell," he cried, "life's cruise is run,
Huzza! huzza! I die true Britain's son!"

Tumultuous was the applause amongst the hardy and gallant crew of the Invulnerable which followed this spirit-stirring nautical effusion, and in which one or two of the officers who had been listening with admiration of the style in which the young mariner sang it, heartily joined.

But the mirth of the happy party was suddenly interrupted by the activity and bustle of those on the upper deck, which was intermingled with the shouts of "A sail in sight ahead!" and all immediately left their festivities, and rushed to share in any duties they might be called upon to perform.

The bright face of the moon shed her silvery smiles on the broad waters of the ocean, and myriads of stars glistened in the clear firmament, rendering the scene at that peaceful moment, beautiful in the extreme. Alas! how soon was that tranquillity destined to be changed.

All eyes were immediately rivetted upon the white sails of a large vessel bearing rapidly down upon them, and in an instant all hands were piped on deck, and the orders passed to clear decks, for every man to be at his post, and to prepare for action. It was quickly discovered—for the night was all in favour of such a discovery—that the approaching craft was no friendly one, and enthusiasm lighted up the spirits, and animated the eager courage of every manly heart on board.

No sooner were the above-mentioned orders given than obeyed; every man in an instant was at his post, and all was activity, excitement, and expectation.

Quickly the enemy—for there was no mistaking the character of the vessel—approached, and she soon gave proof of her saucy and presumptuous disposition, by a mandate through one of her guns, for the Invulnerable to heave too, which modest request was suitably replied to by the Invulnerable declining the polite invitation, hoisting the British ensign full mast high, and the whole of her gallant crew uttering one tremendous cheer, such as British seamen alone can give; all being in readiness to give her a warm salute as soon as she got within gunshot.

"The Alligator," said the captain, who had been watching her through his glass; "prepare yourselves, my lads, we shall probably have some hot work of it presently. This craft is no flincher; I and many of you have had a taste of her quality before. She nears us—ready boys—British seamen must not forget their usual cordial greeting to an enemy on this occasion."

This speech was received with another loud cheer, which rent the air, and which was no less vociferously responded to by the crew of the Alligator, which had now got to within a comparatively short distance of the Invulnerable.

No one among the crew was animated with a more noble and heroic spirit, and a wish to encounter the foe, than Henry Ashford was on that occasion, and the expression of his handsome features, and his manly demeanour altogether, fully testified it, but he thought of those he loved, and breathed a short, but fervent prayer to heaven that he might be preserved for their sakes.

He took the miniature likeness of Phoebe from his bosom, where he constantly wore it nearest his heart, and pressed it to his lips, with a blessing, and then with confidence and alacrity hurried to his post.

The Invulnerable was perhaps over-ready in her courtesy, for no sooner had the Alligator got within range of her, than she poured in a heavy broadside, which was a very fair sample of the kind of civility her opponent might expect to receive. And it is nothing but fair to state that the Alligator was by no means backward in returning the compliment, and the work of destruction commenced in a manner which showed the determination on both sides, to maintain the contest with the most unflinching bravery.

Soon the battle was at its height, the repeated broadsides, the cheers, and splitting of timbers were astounding, and the combatting vessels for a time seemed to be pretty equally matched. The Invulnerable made several attempts to board the enemy, but without success, the Alligator evidently liking her hardy crew much better at a respectful distance.

And thus the terrible conflict continued for more than half an hour, with great loss on both sides. The balls came pattering down like hail-stones, yet nothing could daunt the courage of the brave fellows on board the Invulnerable, and at length the enemy showed evident symptoms of having had the worst of it, and of becoming disheartened, although she still obstinately refused to yield, and the work of destruction continued for some time longer.

Henry Ashford was one who most gallantly distinguished himself, with that cool courage which ever marks the character of the true British seaman, and Providence seemed to watch over him, and for a time, although he was always where danger was the greatest, he remained unscathed, but at length he was struck, and borne bleeding and insensible below.

At the same instant a terrific broadside from the Invulnerable struck the Alligator

betwixt wind and water, she lurched—the unfortunate seamen on board of her gave a fearful shriek, and down she sunk!

The sanguinary battle was at an end, and not one of those who had fought so manfully on board the Alligator survived to tell the startling tale.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE CLOUDS STILL GATHER.

The reader is now requested to suppose an interval of six months to have occurred since the events recorded in the two or three foregoing chapters. We must also, for the present, leave him in a state of mystery as to the fate of Henry Ashford, Lord Selborne, and the villain Beaufort, and once more devote our principal attention to the heroine of our tale.

Six dreary months of continual anxiety had they been to her, and there yet appeared no prospect of any favourable change taking place.

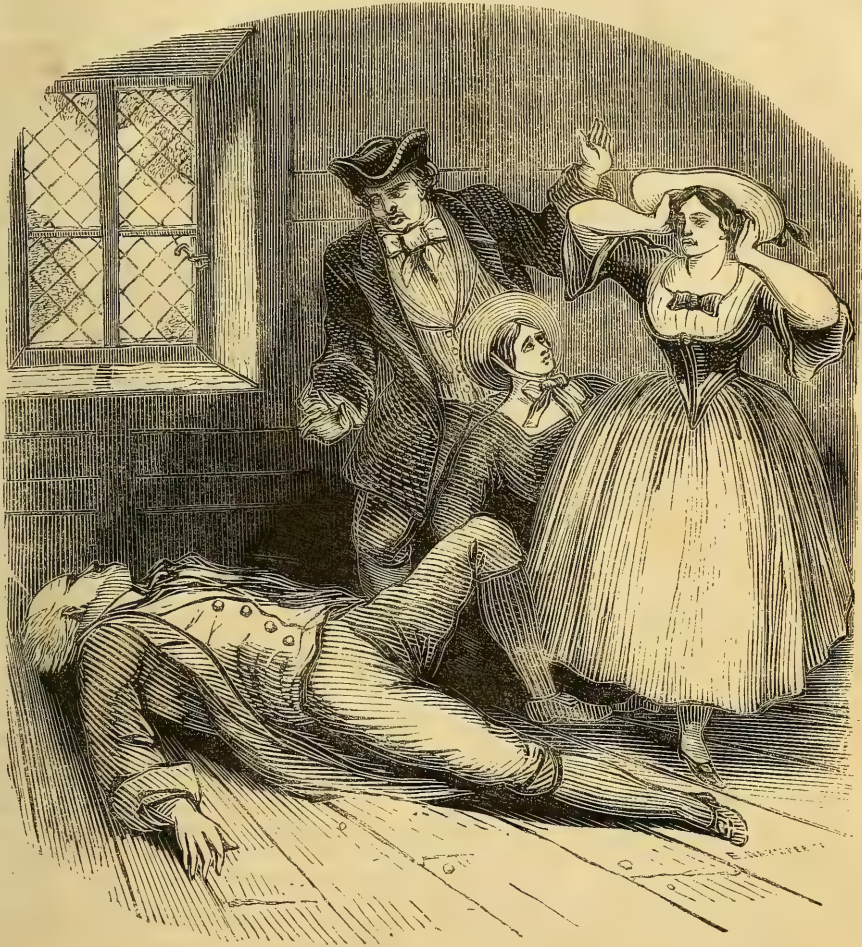
The unfortunate Mark Mayfield daily became worse, and Phoebe had not again been suffered to speak to him, although it had been contrived that she should see him at such times when he should be unconscious of her presence, a melancholy satisfaction, which always served to increase the bitter anguish of her mind, and to strengthen her fears that the light of reason was extinguished for ever.

Mr. Stubbles continued unremitting in his kindness, and Phoebe could never be sufficiently grateful to him, but at length the malady of her poor father became so desperate and alarming, that his removal to York asylum was declared unavoidable, and Phoebe saw the afflicted old man depart, with a bursting heart, and a dismal presentiment that it was the last time should see him alive.

Indeed, as his being ever again restored to his senses was now almost hopeless, death might have been considered as a happy release from his sufferings.

The life of Phoebe indeed continued to be one perpetual gloom, no ray of sunshine ever broke through the black clouds of sorrow and adversity that hung around her destiny, and at times she was so completely worn out with anxiety, that she abandoned herself entirely to despair, and she could not listen with any degree of patience to the words of consolation which Amy sought to impart to her.

And not the least cause of the poor girl's anxiety was the long absence of Henry, and the apprehensions she entertained for his



safety, knowing the fearful dangers to which he would be daily, nay, hourly exposed.

He was never absent from her thoughts, and now that he was away, she felt more forcibly than ever how dear he was to her heart, and deeply, bitterly did she constantly reproach herself for her former conduct towards him, which had been the cause of so much suffering to them all.

"Alas!" she would sigh to herself, when alone, "am I not to blame for all? I destroyed by one false step all those bright visions of happiness, in which myself, my parents, and Henry once indulged, and which but for that would doubtless have been realised. Oh, I dare not reflect, for the more I do so the greater does my guilt appear to be, and the more just though terrible the punishment I am now, and have been for so long a

time receiving. May heaven pardon me, for most bitterly, most keenly, do I feel how much I need appeal to it for mercy and forgiveness."

Sometimes her thoughts, too, would wander to Lord Selborne, and deeply as she reproached him for his cruel conduct, and despised him for the base and unmanly part he had acted towards her, she could not but regret that one who really possessed some noble qualities should have suffered his vicious propensities to prevail. But she always endeavoured to check this feeling and banish him from her memory altogether, as one unworthy of a thought.

With the deepest interest and anxiety her and Amy constantly read the naval intelligence in the newspapers, and the various emotions that agitated their breasts when

they perused a vivid account of the engagement between the Invulnerable and the Alligator, may be easily imagined.

But how torturing were their fears for the safety of Henry in that deadly strife, and at times so strong was the impression on the mind of Phoebe that he was one among the fallen, that she could not remove it, and her brain became distracted.

Amy, too, had her misgivings, though she endeavoured to conceal them from Phoebe, and to encourage her to hope that providence had watched over and protected him, and that the time was not far distant when he would return.

It had been arranged by the authorities of the asylum at York, through the influence of the medical gentleman who had formerly had the unfortunate Mark Mayfield under his treatment, that Phoebe should receive at intervals every necessary information respecting him, but for some time every account was of the most disheartening description, but at length she was informed that, by the most skilful treatment—as his case excited more than usual interest—a very favourable change had taken place; that the violent character of his malady had entirely subsided, that he was calm and docile, in fact, at times almost rational, so great indeed was the improvement in his health that it was not deemed necessary to keep him under the same severe restraint as formerly, and he was allowed to mingle at times with some of the other patients who were progressing towards recovery in the grounds attached to the building.

This was indeed most gratifying news to poor Phoebe, and sincerely and fervently did she return her thanks to heaven for it, and beseech it to restore her unfortunate parent to complete convalescence.

But she was not long permitted to indulge in the hopes that had thus been excited; for about a week afterwards she received the startling intelligence that by some means which could not be clearly ascertained, the poor old man had escaped from the asylum, on one of those occasions when he had been permitted to walk in the grounds, and that though keepers had been dispatched in different directions in search of him, they had not hitherto been able to discover any traces of him.

To describe the astonishment and agony of our heroine at this intelligence would be impossible, and for some time she was completely inconsolable, and Amy was too much concerned and bewildered herself by the extraordinary circumstance to offer her any advice.

“Good God!” exclaimed the poor girl, clasping her hands together, and the tears gushing from her eyes, “when will these

terrible events have an end? When shall I find some relief to the cares and anxieties that continually rack my brain, and bear me down beneath a burden of sorrow almost too great for human nature to support? Unhappy father, whither in your madness can you have gone, and what, oh, what will become of you. Some awful fate I fear has befallen you, or else awaits you. These constant trials are too much for me; I shall go mad—I shall go mad.”

She burst into a violent paroxysm of grief as she gave utterance to these melancholy words, and Amy for some time tried in vain to calm the anguish of her feelings.

It was a terrible night of mental suffering to Phoebe, sleep never closed her eyelids, and at times she was almost distracted. The most agonising fears continually haunted her mind, and it was in vain that she endeavoured to imagine what course to adopt, what means to pursue which might lead to the discovery of her wretched parent.

More than a week passed away without any discovery of the old man taking place, notwithstanding every effort had been made to do so, advertisements being published in all the newspapers, and a reward being offered to any one who might afford information.

It was a fearful mystery that no one could unravel, for it seemed almost incredible that a wretched maniac should be at large, and wandering about the country without having been seen by some, and moreover, by what means could he contrive to exist? It was, however at length solved.

Phoebe and Amy often visited Mr. Stubbles and his wife, in order to receive their advice, and in some degree to ameliorate the anguish of our heroine's mind in their society, and it was usual, if they prolonged their visit till the evening, for Mr. Stubbles to accompany them home.

Their way to the cottage was past the old stone house, and Phoebe always stopped for awhile to contemplate that ancient building, which had so long been the lonely retreat of her unfortunate parent, and to give indulgence to the dismal reflections it created in her mind.

On one of these occasions, Phoebe, as some strange idea seemed to flash upon her brain, expressed an urgent wish to enter the dreary building, in order that she might examine the place in which her father had passed so many hours of his wretchedness; and her friends who were fearful of the effect which such a melancholy inspection might have in the present state of her mind, in vain tried to dissuade her from it, and to withdraw her from the dreary spot.

Finding that she was determined, they reluctantly yielded, and they proceeded to the

back entrance, the door of which had now fallen completely off its hinges, and offered no obstruction to any one who wished to enter the house, which no doubt many a poor wretched wanderer had done since Mark had quitted it.

It was twilight, and it was not yet sufficiently dim and obscure to prevent them from finding their way through the different apartments of the old building, with every part of which, however, Mr. Stubbles was thoroughly acquainted, and led the way, Phoebe and Amy following. A feeling of awe came over them as they entered that ancient place, and our heroine trembled, but still that strange presentiment which had taken possession of her, and which has been before alluded to, urged her on, and she endeavoured to take courage.

They had traversed two or three of the rooms, so cold, desolate, and cheerless, and Mr. Stubbles was proceeding to lead the way to that gloomy chamber in which the poor old man always sat, and where he slept, when they were startled by a rumbling noise, like that which would be produced by the falling of some lumbering article of furniture, and they paused in their progress, while Phoebe and Amy could not resist a feeling of fear that stole over them.

They listened, and our heroine uttered a faint cry, and clung closer to her companion, when a low moaning sound, as if proceeding from some unfortunate being in pain, could be distinctly heard, and which came from the direction of the room to which Mr. Stubbles was guiding them.

"That was a strange noise," remarked Stubbles, "I could almost swear that it was a human voice. But do not be alarmed. We might have been mistaken, and probably it was only the wind which does whistle and moan through the dreary rooms and passages of this old building."

"Oh, no," said Phoebe, in a tremulous voice, "I am certain it was not the wind, but—ah, there again."

Once more the dismal sounds met their ears, and were repeated two or three times.

"There certainly is no mistaking that," observed Mr. Stubbles, "some poor creature has probably sought a shelter here and needs assistance. The sounds seemed to come from the old room in which your unfortunate father usually resided, Miss Phoebe."

Our heroine sighed, and a shuddering sensation came over her, while again a dismal presentiment of what was about to happen crossed her mind. With a look, however, she urged Mr. Stubbles to proceed, and he again led the way through the various gloomy apartments, till they stopped before the door of the one they particularly sought, and the same moaning doleful sounds they

had before heard again saluted their ears, and resolving at once to gratify their curiosity, Mr. Stubbles threw the door back on its hinges, and entered the ancient room, followed timidly by our anxious and foreboding heroine and Amy.

At first the darkness of the room prevented them seeing anything distinctly, but the sounds directed their attention to the particular spot, and the moon which peeped from behind a cloud accelerated their view. Crouching beneath the window was the form of a man, apparently writhing in pain, and moaning dismally. His head was bent upon his chest, so that they could not perceive his features; but could the distracted Phoebe and her companions fail to recognise that well-known aged form? With an exclamation of agony, she immediately rushed towards the sufferer—who seemed to be quite unconscious of their entrance—and raising his head, her suspicions were at once confirmed, she once more gazed upon the pale and haggard countenance of her unfortunate parent.

Yes, by some strange means, after his escape from the York asylum, the poor old man had once more found his way to his former gloomy haunt, there probably to die, for he seemed to be in his last extremity, and to be suffering greatly. How he had managed to live on the road may be imagined; he could only have done so by charity, and scantily indeed, to judge by his appearance, had he been supplied. It was strange, too, that he should not have been arrested in his progress, and restored to the establishment from which he had escaped.

It would be difficult adequately to describe the agony of Phoebe, or the astonishment of her companions at this discovery. Frantically she called upon her wretched father's name, as she pressed his aged head to her bosom, and bathed his pale cheeks with her tears. But he stared vacantly at her, and it was evident that reason had not yet resumed its seat, and that he knew her not.

"Oh, God!" exclaimed the distracted Phoebe, unable to control the powerful emotions of anguish that agitated her, "how torturing is this. Father, dear, afflicted father; that your wretched daughter should behold you thus. Oh, speak to me, if it be only one word. Alas, alas, he knows me not; madness is still upon his brain, and misery and despair alone are left for me. What is to be done, those ghastly looks proclaim the fatal truth; he is dying—he is dying!"

"Compose yourself, Miss Phoebe," said the simple but compassionate Mr. Stubbles, "and it may not turn out so bad as you now apprehend. Poor old man, he is certainly very bad. It is impossible to remove him

from here at present, but assist me to place him on the bed in the next room, and I will hasten to procure medical and other assistance."

This was promptly done, and the poor old man, whose eyes were now closed, and who appeared to be totally unconscious of everything, being placed on the bed which was in the adjoining room—no article of furniture having been disturbed while he was away—Mr. Stubbles left him to the care of his unhappy daughter and Amy, and then hurried away from the house on his humane errand.

With what feelings of agony did our heroine hang over the emaciated form of her afflicted parent, and watch his ghastly countenance with torturing anxiety, while Amy evinced almost the same emotion. How fortunate, however, it was that she had been so strangely prompted to enter the old house, or he must ere long, without assistance, have died, and even now she feared, so terribly was he reduced, probably principally by long privation, that it might be too late to save him.

How impatiently did she await the return of Mr. Stubbles, and every moment that he was absent seemed an age.

But Mr. Stubbles used all the expedition that was possible, and in a short time returned to the house accompanied by two medical gentlemen, and a female domestic, as well as his wife, bringing with them such necessaries as were required, it being impossible to remove the suffering man for the present.

A fire was quickly kindled, and the chamber made as comfortable in other respects, as the time and circumstances would admit, and the medical gentlemen having consulted together lost no time in applying such remedies as the desperate nature of the case required.

How anxiously did Phoebe inquire of them whether there was any hope; but they declined to give any opinion for the present, and it was evident that they entertained great doubts upon the subject, as their patient was so much exhausted by long suffering and want.

Every care and attention that humanity could dictate were bestowed upon him, and having been undressed, and placed in the bed, and some light nutriment administered to him with some difficulty, after a time he did slightly revive, and the symptoms became somewhat less alarming.

Mr. Stubbles endeavoured to persuade Phoebe to return with Amy to the cottage, as every assistance that might be required being now provided, but for some time she would not listen to this advice, so great were her fears and anxiety. At length, however, the old man having dropped off into a calm

sleep, and the doctors having assured her that there was no immediate danger, and Mr. Stubbles telling her that she should receive immediate notice should any unfavourable change take place, she yielded; and after repeatedly kissing the pale cheek of her unconscious parent, she reluctantly quitted the old house, accompanied by Amy, and with a sad heart and the most dismal forebodings returned to the cottage.

On the way thither, and on arriving, she gave free indulgence to the painful feelings that naturally agitated her breast, and Amy in vain sought to impart consolation to her, and to quiet the fears that so disturbed her mind.

"Useless, dear Amy," she said, "are your efforts to excite hopes and expectations in my breast, which I am certain you cannot yourself encourage. The poor old man is too much exhausted by long suffering, and the horrors he has too probably experienced since his escape from the asylum to recover. His fate appears inevitable, and wretched as is his condition, and the little hope there is of his ever again being restored to reason, it is almost sinful to wish that he may live, and thus his misery prolonged. But, alas, to think that he should die without being able to recognise me, or to pronounce my forgiveness, distracts my brain. Oh, God! in mercy do not suffer him thus to die, let the light of reason once more dawn upon his mind, that he may once more know his unhappy child, be convinced of her true penitence, and pronounce her forgiveness, then might I meet the melancholy bereavement with resignation."

"Your prayers, I trust, Phoebe," said her companion, "will be granted, hopeless as at present it may seem to be. Be firm, and await the issue with patience, and providence will not suffer the fears that now agitate your breast to be realised."

Phoebe shook her head mournfully, and all her endeavours to banish her dismal fears and forebodings were unavailing.

It was not until a late hour of the night that she could be persuaded to retire to her chamber, for every minute she expected a summons from the old house; but as nothing of the kind took place, she became more calm, and endeavoured to hope for the best.

To sleep, however, with such painful thoughts crowding upon and racking her mind, was impossible, and she awaited the arrival of the morning with the utmost impatience.

When at length it came, she could hardly wait to partake of the morning repast, so great was her anxiety to know the state of her unfortunate parent, and the meal having been hastily despatched, her and Amy took their departure from the cottage.

With a palpitating heart, Phoebe approached the dreary and ancient building, while mingled hopes and fears agitated her breast, although the latter greatly predominated.

It was indeed a great relief to her to find that those fears were not realised, and that all was much more promising than under the circumstances she could at all have anticipated.

Her father had undergone no unfavourable change, but had passed a pretty tranquil night. The attentions and exertions of the medical gentlemen, and those who had remained in attendance upon the patient during the night, had not been in vain, and he was now perfectly calm, and strong hopes were entertained that he would ultimately recover, although no symptoms of returning reason yet presented themselves; in fact, all hope of that ever taking place seemed to be at an end.

It was resolved, as soon as he had sufficiently recovered, that he should be removed to the residence of Mr. Stubbles, and Phoebe could not give her consent to his again being taken to the York asylum, where he might be so far separated from her, and she might have no opportunity of beholding him.

Mark remained in a kind of stupor during the greater part of the day, and seemed to suffer no pain, and our heroine scarcely ever for a moment quitted his bedside, but watched him with the tenderest affection and the deepest anxiety.

With what bitter anguish and regret did she gaze upon his haggard, ghastly features, that told so terrible a tale of suffering, and what torturing reflections, and retrospections of the fearful past did it give rise to in her mind.

Once or twice during the day he seemed to revive for a few minutes, and at such times he would fix his eyes wildly but earnestly upon the countenance of his daughter as though he was endeavouring, but in vain, to recall her to his memory; and the excitement and suspense of Phoebe would then become almost insupportable. But quickly he would relapse into his former state of apathy, and all was again darkness in his benighted intellect.

Throughout that day the poor old man underwent no material change, and certainly there was nothing to excite the serious alarm which had been created on his discovery. Indeed the doctors who were in attendance upon him, and who were both very skilful men, now expressed the most sanguine hopes of his ultimate recovery to bodily health, if they could not hold out any expectations of his restoration to reason; but they enjoined the strictest precaution and care, especially on the part of Phoebe, lest by causing in

him any particular excitement, it might be productive of the most dangerous consequences.

It is needless to follow the progress of Mark Mayfield from day to day; suffice it to say that skilful treatment, and the most unremitting care and attention were rewarded with the best results, and in little more than a week, he was so far restored to convalescence, as to be able to be removed from the gloomy old house to the comfortable and hospitable residence of Mr. Stubbles, and where he could receive all that further attention which his melancholy case required, and our heroine could have an opportunity of seeing him every day.

His malady appeared too certainly settled, but it was not of that violent description which formerly characterised it; and he showed the greatest submission to his keeper, and of attachment to Mr. Stubbles and his wife, of whose kindness at times he seemed to have some vague idea.

Much of his time was passed in bemoaning the supposed fate of his daughter, then reproaching her for her heartlessness and ingratitude, and how did it wring the heart of poor Phoebe to listen to him, and what would she not have given could she have made herself known to him, and, if only for a brief period, she could have awakened his dormant senses to reason. But, alas, there was no hope of that, and gloomy indeed was the prospect before her.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE BOUNDLESS DEEP AGAIN.

On sped the long boat containing Lord Selborne and many of the crew and passengers of the ill-fated vessel, which they beheld still burning fiercely in the distance, and it was not till some minutes after they had left the ship that it was discovered Beaufort was left behind, and many deplored the awful fate to which the wretched man was apparently too surely consigned; and in spite of the villany of his former associate, and the great cause, he had to look upon him with disgust and abhorrence, if not with absolute dread, Lord Selborne could not help participating in those feelings to a certain extent. He also deeply regretted that the important secret to which Beaufort alluded, and on which his future happiness probably in a great measure depended, could now never be revealed to him, and he racked his brain to no purpose to endeavour to conjecture what the nature of it could be.

The situation of the unfortunate persons in the boat was now most miserable and dis-

heartening. True, they had escaped the flames, but what was the prospect before them? As far as their anxious eyes could stretch across the dark waters of the ocean, no signs of land appeared in sight, no friendly vessel, which might receive them, and so hurried had been the necessity of their departure that they had not had time to secure the least portion of provisions, so that unless providence should mercifully send them some speedy relief, the most horrible fate seemed inevitably to await them.

Lord Selboene, however, bore up against his misfortunes with much more patience and fortitude than could have been expected, and he uttered no murmur of complaint, but sat in the boat silent and thoughtful, and endeavouring to resign himself to his fate, whatever that fate might be.

The anguish and anxiety of mind he had so long endured, and the disappointment to all his hopes, had rendered him completely indifferent to life; and thus the dangers by which himself and his companions were now surrounded, had no terrors for him.

All signs of the unfortunate ship had now disappeared, and everything was wrapped in gloom and darkness. The wind increased, until it blew a stiff gale, and the boat was dashed furiously along at the mercy of the waves, the seamen having little control over it, and it was so overloaded, that at times, it was in danger of capsizing.

The weather became tempestuous, and it was piercingly cold, and most of them being only half dressed felt it severely, few more so than his lordship. In fact, nothing could possibly be more deplorable and hopeless than their situation, and they had ample cause to entertain the most gloomy and torturing apprehensions.

Lord Selborne again recalled the guilty events of the past to his memory, and he could not but consider that this was no more than a just punishment for his crimes, and one against which he had no just cause to murmur.

And thus they continued throughout the remainder of the night, with not the least prospect of deliverance, or anything to inspire them with hope.

When daylight broke, the misery of their situation was made, if possible, still more apparent. No signs of land yet appeared, and they had no means of ascertaining the course in which the boat was being driven, but were compelled to leave everything to chance.

The other boat, which had been the last to put off from the burning ship, although it had for some time kept up with them as well as it could, had disappeared in the darkness of the night, and nothing of it could now be seen as far as the eye could stretch,

so that they were left in a state of painful uncertainty as to the fate of the unfortunate persons in it, although taking all the circumstances into consideration, they had every reason to fear the worst.

The weather continued boisterous, the wind had not in the least abated, and the rain now descended in torrents, rendering the misery of their situation still more complete.

And thus for hours they continued, with nothing to inspire them with hope, and cold, wet, and wretched, the patience of several of them was exhausted, and they gave vent to their feelings of anguish and despair, in the most dismal lamentations. As the day wore tediously away, and still not the least prospect of relief presented itself, and the cravings of hunger began to steal upon them, their sufferings became more intense, and their murmurs of complaint more frequent, and it would seem as if they madly blamed each other for those misfortunes they could none of them help, but which it was entirely the will of fate to inflict upon them.

Lord Selborne still remained silent, but his sufferings both physically and mentally were nevertheless equally as severe as those of his companions, and he felt as though it would be impossible for him to bear up against them for any considerable length of time. He sat huddled up in the boat, drenched to the skin, and shivering with cold, and nothing could be more truly wretched than his looks.

Another night—another night of unmitigated horror came, and still the unfortunate beings were apparently as far remote from the prospect of relief as ever.

The weather also increased in violence, "it blew great guns," the waves heaved and rolled to a mountainous height, sweeping over them with resistless fury, threatening destruction every instant. The rain continued to pour down in sheets, the rattling thunder competed with the roaring waves and the howling wind, and the impenetrable darkness was only broken in upon at intervals by the vivid flashes of lightning that darted and glared across the angry billows, revealing more clearly the frightful and apparently insurmountable dangers by which they were surrounded.

And now in the midst of their misery, a tremendous wave swept two of their wretched companions in misfortune from the boat, but so much was every one engrossed by the thoughts of his own danger, that they could view the fate of those unfortunate men with the most perfect indifference.

And then the gnawings of hunger that every moment became more intolerable, were maddening in effect, and could not but add to the terrors that distracted them.

Terrible thoughts began to take possession of their minds, and looked at each other with a greediness of expression which had a fearful meaning.

During that awful night three more of the ill-fated persons perished, two men and a woman, which the others viewed as rather a fortunate circumstance than otherwise, as the previous overloading of the boat rendered it in danger of foundering every minute.

Lord Selborne was so much exhausted that he found it impossible to bear up at all, and he lay crouched down in the bottom of the boat almost in a state of unconsciousness.

He saw nothing but death before him, and he could view its expected approach with perfect calmness, nay, almost with impatience, for death would be a happy release from horrors and sufferings too great for human endurance.

The storm continued throughout the night, but towards morning it fortunately greatly abated; it ceased to rain, the wind went down, and the thunder died away in sullen murmurs in the distance.

Daylight broke, and with its first dawn arose a wild shriek of delight from the wretched sufferers, for land appeared in sight at no great distance, towards the north-east, and those who had sufficient strength remaining, exerted themselves to guide the boat in that direction.

As they approached nearer, it appeared to be a small island, sloping gradually down to almost the level of the sea, and on it they could behold a number of tall trees, and signs of vegetation, which inspired them with fresh hopes. The situation and formation of the island, too, rendered it easy of access from the ocean, and seemed to make the task of landing, in spite of their weak and exhausted condition, comparatively simple.

The wind was in their favour, and in little more than an hour they approached so close to it, that two or three friendly waves dashed them within reach of it, and the boat having become embedded in the sandy beach, assisting each other as well as they could, they managed to crawl safely on shore, where quite worn out with their exertions, and long fasting, they sunk on the humid earth almost in a state of insensibility, and in which they remained for some time, unable to speak to each other, to congratulate themselves on their immediate deliverance from death, or to consult what was best to be done.

But at present, at any rate, their situation appeared to be very little better than that from which they had escaped. It was many, many hours since any of them had taken a morsel of food, and unless the island was

inhabited, and the means of speedy relief was afforded them, nothing but a horrible death of starvation awaited them.

After resting themselves for awhile, they looked eagerly around them, but saw nothing to inspire them with any particular degree of hope, though the aspect of the island was far from desolate, but from the spot where they at present were they could see no signs of its being inhabited.

Two of them whose robust constitutions had enabled them to bear up against the sufferings and privations to which they had been exposed much better than the rest, undertook to reconnoitre, and mustering up all the strength and resolution they could, they were about to start on that errand, when they were arrested in their purpose for the moment by the shouts of one of the seamen, who, unnoticed by his companions, had crawled once more to the sandy beach, and was now returning with a large turtle which he had been so fortunate as to find washed on shore.

This to persons in their desperate and starving condition, was indeed a God-send, and they returned their heartfelt gratitude to heaven for even this temporary relief. It was quickly cut up, and a portion of it being fairly divided amongst them, the remainder was carefully reserved for a future occasion.

This, small even as it was, afforded them much relief, and somewhat raised their hopes and spirits. The two men who had volunteered to do so, then started on their errand, and the rest huddled close together for the sake of imparting some degree of warmth to their benumbed limbs, and awaited their return and the result of their search with all the patience they could, keeping on that prominent part of the island from which they could command an extensive and uninterrupted view of the ocean.

The storm had now entirely ceased, the weather became calm and fine, and the sun shining forth in all its splendour, somewhat ameliorated the misery of their condition; but still most of them, particularly the two or three women and children were so much reduced, that it seemed almost impossible that they could hold out much longer.

Lord Selborne lay stretched upon the earth unable to rise, but he was perfectly sensible, and calm and resigned to his fate whatever it might be, and not a word of complaint escaped his lips. But in that moment of suffering, his thoughts were principally fixed upon Phoebe, and mentally he prayed for her happiness should she be still living, whilst he deeply lamented that providence had not permitted him to discover her, so that he might have offered her all the atonement it was in his power to make for the wrongs he had done her.

Two hours elapsed before the men returned, bringing with them some wild fruit, of which they said there was an abundance in the island, but they had been unable to discover any signs of its being inhabited.

They had also discovered a spring of pure water at a short distance from the spot on which they now were, at which they had slaked their thirst, and would have brought some of it to their companions if they had had the means to convey it in.

This information was upon the whole rather cheering, as, at any rate, there were the means of prolonging existence until some assistance might arrive, and their fears and anxiety of mind were in a great measure diminished.

Having secured the boat as well as they could, and partaken of the fruit, and the remainder of the turtle, which, under the circumstances, seemed to them to be perfectly delicious, they stretched their weary and exhausted limbs upon the earth, as close together as possible, and endeavoured to obtain that sleep they stood so much in need of, and in which they at length succeeded.

And thus passed the first day and night of their being on the island.

The following morning they awoke much refreshed and in better spirits, especially as the weather continued fine. They looked eagerly across the ocean, with the hope of seeing some friendly vessel, but they were doomed to disappointment. They turned their thoughts towards the persons in the other boat, but as they could see nothing of them they had too much reason to fear that they had perished in the storm.

They were again fortunate enough to obtain several more shell fish that had been washed on the beach, and having procured a fresh supply of fruit, and some of the water from the spring, which they conveyed in one or two of the leathern hats of the sailors, and served out in shells which they had found among the rocks, their spirits revived, and they resolved to remain on the island for a day or two, in order to recruit their strength, and if no assistance reached them in the meantime from any friendly vessel, then to venture forth in the boat on that discovery which they ventured to hope would be crowned with success.

It was astonishing with what patience and fortitude the women and children had endured the many hardships to which they had been exposed; and it is but due to the men to say that they treated them with the greatest kindness and consideration, even when they themselves had been suffering all the anguish of despair. It may also be mentioned that Lord Selborne had been throughout treated with the utmost respect, of which he was not unmindful.

Two more days and nights they remained on the island, without any particular incident worth recording taking place, and still no signs of assistance appeared, and as the weather continued remarkably fine, and they were recruited in health and spirits, they made up their minds to venture on the following day out to sea, with the hope of either meeting with some ship, or gaining some friendly coast.

They procured an abundant supply of fruit, enough to last them for some time, also a moderate quantity of fish, which they stowed away carefully in the boat, which had fortunately weathered the late fearful storm bravely, and had sustained no material damage, and they then awaited the time they had fixed for their departure with mingled hopes and fears, the former of which, however, greatly prevailed.

The following morning, just at break of day, while his companions were still sleeping, one of the men who had been on the look out—a duty which they had taken alternately since they had been on the island—aroused them with the welcome cry of “a sail—a sail!” and starting to their feet, and rushing to the spot where the man was standing, the joyful confirmation of his words was made apparent to their eyes.

Crowding all sail with a favouring wind, at a comparatively short distance from the island, appeared a stately ship, and the glad prospect of deliverance which had been so long delayed now seemed at hand, especially as the vessel was fortunately sailing in the right direction, and they could scarcely fail to be observed.

It would be a difficult task to describe the feelings of joy and gratitude that now animated the breasts of those unfortunate beings who had been exposed to so many hardships and dangers, and who at one time had nothing but the almost certain prospect of an awful death before their eyes. All being in readiness, they lost no time in hastening to the boat, and entering it, they put off with all the speed that the wind and the waves would allow them to make towards the vessel.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE RESCUE.

As they approached nearer the ship, they could plainly perceive from its build that it was an English craft, a frigate, and all doubts of their being received on board in the most friendly manner were removed, and having signalled it by waving their hats and handkerchiefs in the air, it was quickly apparent that those on board saw them, for they



slackened sail, in order to enable them to come up with her, which in a short time they did, and were immediately taken on board, and received with every kindness.

It was the English ship *Zealous*, homeward bound, after having been on a three years station, and they therefore received a hearty welcome, and every attention was paid to their present necessities, as soon as they had briefly explained the unfortunate accident which had placed them in so perilous a situation.

Lord Selborne felt doubly gratified when he recognised in the captain an old and intimate acquaintance, and the latter expressed no little surprise at meeting with his lordship under such extraordinary circumstances.

A few hours being on board the *Zealous*,
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and the society and kind treatment of the captain, seemed to effect an immediate and wonderful change in the spirits of Lord Selborne, and he could never be sufficiently grateful for his preservation, and he endeavoured to look forward to the future with tranquillity and resignation, if not with absolute hope.

The vessel proceeded on its way, propelled by favourable winds, and the remainder of that day passed over without anything worth relating occurring.

The supposed awful fate of the wretched, guilty Beaufort, on board the burning ship, often occupied the thoughts of Lord Selborne, and notwithstanding the crimes of which he had been guilty, and how much reason he had to abhor him for the many errors into which he had by his insidious artifices led

him, he could not help feeling for him some degree of compassion, and regretted that he should be thus hurried into eternity with all his crimes upon his soul and unrepented.

The observations which Beaufort had also made to him on their singular meeting, and the important secret which he had declared he could impart to him, and which he had every reason to believe related to Phoebe, frequently occurred to his memory, and harassed and bewildered his mind with fruitless conjectures. He regretted that the death of Beaufort would now leave the mystery attached to his dark hints and assertions for ever unravell'd.

"And yet," he soliloquised, "why should I suffer myself to bestow one serious thought upon this subject? Why should I place any reliance on the statements of such a consummate scoundrel, who probably only sought to cajole and intimidate me for the purpose of extortion? Too much have I already suffered by his villany, surely ever again to have been made his dupe. I will endeavour to think no more of this business. The guilty man is no more, therefore all fear of exposure from his lips is at an end. Would to heaven that my own guilty conscience could as easily acquit me. Oh, Phoebe, much wronged, innocent Phoebe, shall I never be permitted to see you again, that I may throw myself at your feet, implore your forgiveness, and make all the atonement I can for the cruel part I have acted towards you?"

He sighed deeply as these melancholy thoughts occurred to him, and severe and almost insupportable was the anguish of his mind.

But we will now proceed to relate the further adventures of the guilty Beaufort, who, notwithstanding the awful and apparently hopeless situation in which we left him, after his narrow escape from the ill-fated vessel, still survived.

Stretched on that barren rock, which he had gained with so much difficulty and desperate exertion, he remained in a perfect state of insensibility for hours, and perhaps it would have been better for the wretched man had he never more revived to a knowledge of the horrors by which he was surrounded.

When he was restored to some degree of sensibility, daylight was just beginning to break through the darkness, and the storm was at its height. He looked above at the angry sky, and he gazed wildly upon the foaming billows, that dashed against the rocks with a deafening roar, and for a minute or two he remained almost unconscious of the full extent of his misery, or of the dreadful events that had taken place.

But too soon was he aroused to recollect-

tion, and, with a cry of agony, such as might be expected to escape the lips of some wretched maniac in one of his wildest paroxysms, he endeavoured to rise to his feet, but his limbs were so benumbed with the cold and the wet that it was some moments ere he could do so, and then he quickly sunk again on his knees quite exhausted, and clasping his hands together vehemently, he gazed across the foaming waters of the deep with looks of the most indescribable horror and despair.

Dreadful indeed was the scene before him. A boundless waste of stormy waters, a broad expanse of blackened sky, ever and anon illuminated by the lightning's flash; no chance, no prospect of relief; nothing but death in its most appalling form before his eyes.

For several minutes he remained fixed in the same attitude, and madness seemed to be fast gathering upon his brain. It seemed almost impossible that he could long survive in such a horrible situation, or that he could withstand the fury of the battling elements which seemed to mock his sufferings.

For some minutes every faculty was suspended, and he could not utter a word, but when he did so, the most fearful curses escaped his lips, and he clenched his fists, and struck his forehead in a perfect frenzy.

But at length he was wrought up to a pitch of complete desperation, and rising hastily from his knees, he gazed above, below, and around him with harrowing feelings of anguish which may be imagined, but it is utterly impossible to describe. For a moment the thought occurred to him of putting at once an end to his misery, by plunging from the small ledge of rock on which he was standing into the sea; but some invisible power seemed to arrest him in his deadly purpose, and clasping his forehead with his hands, he abandoned himself to all the tortures which the dreadful circumstances in which he was placed naturally created in his breast.

Rock upon rock was piled above his head, and overhanging the spot on which he was standing, and he felt a strange curiosity to clamber to the utmost height, but in his present exhausted condition he could hardly hope to accomplish so difficult and dangerous a task. But at length he aroused all his energies, and with the vague idea that he might in some measure better his wretched condition, or, at any rate, be able to obtain a more extensive view, he resolved, at all hazards to make the attempt.

Grasping a craggy point of rock immediately above his head, by a desperate effort of strength he raised himself from the ledge on which he had been standing, and so continued to clamber from rock to rock—some-

times in danger of losing his foothold—until he nearly gained the summit, but was then obliged to pause upon another ledge, or rather table of the rock—for it was much larger than the one he had before occupied—completely exhausted by the extraordinary exertions he had undergone, and he then perceived a wide, deep cavity which he hailed with satisfaction, for it would at least afford him some shelter, from the fury of the raging elements, while from it he could obtain an extensive view for miles, and be able to discover from a distance any vessel that providence might be so merciful as to send in sight.

He crept into it, and crouched down amongst the sea-weed which there grew in abundance, and gazed anxiously, from a different point of view to that which he had previously obtained, as far as his eyes could stretch, and he could not help giving utterance to a wild exclamation of frantic joy, when in the distance he beheld the dark outlines of what appeared to be land, and which seemed to stretch away to a considerable extent.

But, alas, what melancholy, what agonising feelings did the sight of this excite in the breast of that miserable man. He beheld the means of almost certain escape from death, without the possibility of reaching it; and surely nothing could be more torturing than that thought. He groaned in the very agony of his feelings, and beat his breast and tore his hair, at the same time uttering the most dreadful and bitter curses on the cruel fate that pursued him.

Again he strained his eyes towards the supposed land, and in the confusion and bewilderment of his disordered imagination, could almost fancy that he beheld the shadows of human forms moving about, and in the excitement of the moment, caused by this delusion of the senses, he shouted aloud for help, as though his voice could be heard, and even above that of the tempest, at such a distance; but awakened to a full sense of the fruitlessness of his efforts, he sunk back powerless, and in all the misery of his maddening thoughts.

His situation was now far more awful than it had been when he was on the desolate and uninhabited island, although so similar in many of its circumstances, and the desperate courage that usually characterised him, even under the greatest difficulties, now almost forsook him.

And then after meeting in so extraordinary a manner with his intended victim, Lord Selborne, and with every prospect of the accomplishment of his nefarious designs before him, to meet with such a fate, was more torturing than all, and he could not meet the disappointment with any degree of patience.

"Accursed fate is against me," he said, "and seems to mock me, frustrating all my designs at the very moment when their success appeared certain. How Selborne must have exulted when he found that I was left to perish in the burning ship, and by which he hoped for ever to get rid of one whom he had so much reason to dread. He will probably be saved, while nothing but a frightful death awaits me. The triumph this time, at any rate, is his, and all my ambitious designs and guilty wishes are at an end. No matter, 'tis my destiny, and whatever may yet be in store for me, and however great the horrors it may be my lot to have to encounter, I will meet them boldly as a man, and not as a drivelling cur."

He endeavoured to become firm as he uttered these words, but under all the terrible circumstances in which he was placed that was a task not easy of accomplishment. He sunk into a gloomy train of thought, every now and then giving vent to his feelings in curses loud and deep, and still with his eyes fixed steadfastly and wistfully upon the distant land.

His only food that day was a biscuit which he fortunately found in his pocket, much saturated with the sea water, which he greedily eat, and trifling as it was it served in some measure to appease his appetite. And now all chance of obtaining food was at an end, and he could only remain on that barren rock to starve.

Towards the afternoon the storm had greatly abated, and it gradually subsided altogether. Beaufort continued with his eyes fixed upon the ocean, with the most gloomy intensity and earnestness, but without seeing anything in the least degree to excite his hopes.

But suddenly, as he still looked, he imagined he beheld something floating on the surface of the water, and drifting with the wind in the direction of the rock, and he strained his eyes to the utmost to endeavour to discover what it was.

It was some time ere his curiosity and anxiety were gratified; but with much labour and difficulty descending the rock to the ledge which he had at first occupied, as the object approached nearer, to his great astonishment and gratification, he discovered it to be a raft, which had probably been used by some unfortunate persons in a fruitless attempt to escape from the wreck of some vessel in the late storm.

Beaufort could scarcely believe his eyes, and now the hope of speedy deliverance once more animated his breast, for the raft might enable him to reach the land towards which he had so long been anxiously gazing, and there he might providentially meet with that assistance he so much required.

But even while these thoughts passed so hastily in his mind, the wind veered, and the raft was drifted from its former course, and more immediately towards the distant land.

Beaufort saw that there was not a moment to be lost, and hastily descending from the ledge of the rock, even weak as he was, once more committed himself to the waves, and struck out more vigorously than could have been at all expected towards the raft, which after some difficulty he gained, and with a convulsive effort struggled upon it, and sunk prostrate and breathless, it being some minutes before he could recover himself, and having no alternative but to leave himself to the mercy of the wind and the waves, which, however, favoured his hopes and wishes, and drove the raft in the direction of the land.

Beaufort now arose and seated himself upon the raft, and the nature of his feelings at this fortunate event, and the prospect of speedy deliverance, need not be described.

Nearer and nearer the raft approached the island, and as it did so, Beaufort could perceive that the aspect of it was much more favourable than his most sanguine hopes could have anticipated. It lay high, but he hoped to be able to reach some point of it where he might land without difficulty.

As he proceeded, the different portions of the wreck that floated past, convinced him that he was right in his conjectures, and that the unfortunate vessel had been wrecked even within sight of land, and which the crew, or part of it had probably endeavoured to reach on the raft, but had perished in the attempt.

Slowly but surely the raft glided on, and was fortunately drifting towards a small creek, which Beaufort now for the first time perceived, and by which he could land without any difficulty.

Another quarter of an hour brought him to it, the raft stranded, thus for the present, at any rate, securing it, and the next moment Beaufort, to his unspeakable pleasure, once more found himself safe on land, and overpowered by the various emotions that rushed tumultuously upon him, he sunk upon his knees, and even that guilty man in the fullness of his heart, attempted to offer up a prayer of gratitude.

It was some minutes ere he could recover his composure, and he then turned his attention to the character of the place in which he now found himself, and the first aspect of it was sufficient to give him a favourable idea of it, and to renew his hopes.

The island seemed to be of considerable extent, and was thickly wooded, the trees many of them growing to an immense height, and their wide spreading branches forming a

cool and refreshing shelter from the too powerful rays of the sun.

Through long vistas of these stately trees—which were as well arranged as if they had been planted in some gentleman's park or pleasure grounds—Beaufort caught a more extensive view of this scene, which was extremely picturesque, and afforded him much relief after the misery and horror of that from which he had just escaped, and he could not help encouraging an idea that it was inhabited, although whether by those who might prove friendly to him was another and important consideration.

However, before he proceeded to examine further, it was necessary that he should rest himself for a short time; stretching his limbs on the earth therefore beneath the thickly foliated canopy that the branches of the trees afforded, he endeavoured to collect his thoughts and to revive his hopes.

Here he had not been many minutes, when a drowsy sensation came over him, but as he was about to yield to its influence, he was startled by hearing the voices of men, and jumping hastily to his feet, and looking in the direction from whence it proceeded, his astonishment, not unmingled with some feelings of doubt and fear, may be imagined when he beheld two native Indians, each of them carrying a musket, approaching the spot on which he was standing, and who seemed no less surprised than himself on beholding him, uttered a wild exclamation, and stopped abruptly, gazing earnestly at him and seeming to hesitate what to do.

Beaufort, too, was somewhat puzzled how to act, seeing that they were both armed, but it was soon evident that they had no unfriendly feeling towards him by their looks and gestures, and it was not unlikely that his miserable appearance, and the ghastly, spectre-like aspect of his features excited their pity as well as curiosity, for even savages are not insensible to such feelings at all times. He therefore ventured to approach them, holding out his hand with a look of humility and supplication, which they grasped eagerly, and with every demonstration of sympathy and cordiality.

Beaufort was gratified to find that one of them knew sufficient of broken English to make himself understood, and from him he learnt, after he had related such of the particulars of his own adventures and misfortunes as he deemed prudent, that the island was inhabited by two friendly tribes, and that it afforded them ample support by the means of their guns.

After explaining some further particulars, in as few words as possible, for these people are generally inclined to be rather taciturn, they motioned Beaufort to follow them, and they would see to his necessities, which he

did with every confidence, and retracing their steps by the way they had come, and breaking from the trees into a more open part of the island, Beaufort had a better opportunity of observing the character of it, which was most favourable.

After proceeding a short distance, Beaufort perceived several small huts or wigwams, before which some women and children, and two or three men were engaged in different ways.

Here the man who was able to speak a little English, told Beaufort to stop for a minute or two, while he and his companion went forward to explain to their friends. This they did, and Beaufort awaited the result with no little anxiety and impatience.

They quickly returned, accompanied by one or two of the females, who seemed to view Beaufort with no small degree of curiosity and pity. They having then exchanged a few words with the men, he was conducted to one of the wigwams, where he was immediately supplied with provisions consisting of smoked venison and a kind of broth, very palatable, and to Beaufort, after the privation he had suffered, a perfect luxury; and in short, nothing could be greater than the kindness and hospitality with which these simple and uncivilised people treated him, and even he could not help feeling grateful.

Having satisfied the cravings of hunger, he was conducted to a place of rest, and there he abandoned himself to the various busy thoughts that crowded so rapidly on his brain. And here for the present we will leave him, and once more return to the *Invulnerable* and Henry Ashford, whom we left, after the gallant fight between that ship and the *Alligator*, wounded and insensible.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE SAILOR'S RETURN.

The accident which had occurred to Harry Ashford in the engagement, it is hardly necessary to state, caused the deepest regret among the officers and crew, with whom, as has been shown, he was a special favourite, and the utmost anxiety was felt for his recovery.

But although the wound he had received was a severe one, it was not considered dangerous, and it was therefore hoped that a short time would probably restore him to health.

For some days, however, Henry continued in a very excited state, and it required the greatest care and attention to prevent any serious consequences.

The young seaman thought of his beloved Phoebe, and Amy his sister, and his fears and anxiety lest his wound should prove fatal, and that he might never be permitted to behold them again, cannot be wondered at. How fervently did he beseech heaven to suffer him to survive for their dear sakes, and that they might not be deprived of his future protection, for should he perish how could they, he reflected, ever find fortitude and resignation to withstand so terrible a shock. He shuddered at the thought, and he could not, in spite of all his efforts, resist the fears and forebodings that would alternately distract his mind.

As he gazed upon the likeness of Phoebe, which he so fondly treasured, and pictured to himself the thoughts and anxiety as to his fate which he so well knew must constantly occupy her mind, at times he was almost unmanned, and he in vain tried to look forward to the future with patience, hope, and confidence.

These feelings naturally retarded his recovery, but at length he became more calm, and the consequence was that his wound took a favourable turn, and in a few days afterwards he was so far recovered as to be able to walk the deck, although it must necessarily be some time ere he could be able to resume his duty.

He continued to progress favourably, and the *Invulnerable* proceeding without any further disaster on its course, by the time it had arrived at its destination and joined the squadron to which it was directed, he was completely restored to convalescence, and the same spirits by which he had always been animated.

* * * *

The war was for the present at an end, victory had again rewarded the courage and bravery of the British navy, and once more the *Invulnerable*, with a portion of the fleet, was homeward bound, propelled by favouring winds, and with light and hopeful hearts on board at the prospect of returning to their native land, and to those so dear to them.

And one of the happiest on board that noble ship, which had ever so triumphantly braved the battle and the breeze, was Harry Ashford, and many were the prayers he uttered for the welfare of Phoebe and his sister, and that they might have escaped every trouble and danger during the time he had been separated from them.

This, as has been before stated, was to be his last voyage, and he tried to look forward to his union with Phoebe, and the happiness that thus awaited him, with the most sanguine anticipations and expectations.

There were times, however, when he could not help feeling some apprehensions and

suspicious as regarded Lord Selborne, and especially when he remembered the strange and mysterious words which the old gipsy sybil had on more than one occasion uttered to him; yet he quickly dismissed those thoughts from his mind as unworthy of encouragement, and felt surprised that he should for a moment have permitted the predictions of a silly old woman to make any impression on him.

There was one thought, however, which did cause him the most painful anxiety, for probably the future happiness or misery of Phoebe depended on it; and that was the fate of poor old Mark. He dared scarcely encourage the hope that he had recovered from the unfortunate malady which had so long afflicted him, and therefore all hope of Phoebe obtaining his forgiveness seemed to be at an end; and, alas, that must serve to embitter her future days, and to destroy that peace and tranquility which might otherwise be her's.

Nothing particular occurred on the homeward bound voyage, and at length the white cliffs of old England appeared in sight, and every heart bounded with joyful expectation, none more so than that of Henry Ashford

* * * *

Mark Mayfield during this time had remained in much the same state as that in which we last left him, and the painful anxiety of our heroine was consequently but little abated, though there were times when she could not banish from her mind altogether the hope of his ultimate restoration to reason.

He was seldom violent; but his terrible affliction generally wore the character of melancholy madness, sometimes weeping like a child; and what could possibly be more torturing to the mind of Phoebe than to witness her aged parent's suffering. Constantly did her prayers ascend to heaven for him, and that he might yet be permitted to recognise her and pronounce her pardon.

He still remained at the residence of Mr. Stubbles, who, with his kind-hearted wife, continued to pay him all the care and attention that humanity could suggest, and Phoebe felt that she owed those excellent people a debt of gratitude which she feared it would never be in her power to repay.

Need we say that the thoughts of Phoebe and Amy were constantly fixed on Harry, and that they looked forward to his safe return to England with mingled hopes and fears? He was never absent from their imagination, and absence rendered him more dear to the heart of Phoebe than ever, and convinced her how necessary he was to her happiness.

And thus another interval of three months elapsed, when the glad tidings of the termi-

nation of the war reached England, and of the British fleet being on its way home, and many were those who waited the realisation of that event with trembling impatience.

Many a manly heart had ceased to beat, many a noble head had been laid low in the dreadful casualties of the dreadful strife, and alas, what numbers too probably have to mourn the loss of those so dear to them.

With what suspense did our heroine and Amy await the arrival of the important day, and constantly watch the newspapers to obtain the earliest intelligence of the returning fleet, now buoyed with hope, and again tortured by fear and misgiving. But it came at last; news arrived of the squadron being safely moored in the Downs, and the next day the fears and doubts of Phoebe and Amy were removed by receiving the welcome letter from Harry, announcing, in terms of affection which may readily be imagined, his safety, and the promise to return home, as soon as he was permitted by the rules of the ship to do so.

It would be a fruitless task to seek to describe the unbounded feelings of joy and gratitude that animated their breasts at this intelligence, and with what fond anticipation they looked forward to the moment of meeting after so long an absence. Fervently they poured forth their thanks to heaven for his preservation from the numerous dangers to which he had doubtless been exposed.

The day was a lovely one, the weather for some time indeed had been remarkably fine, and all nature seemed to smile with the genial blessings of heaven.

The old inn in the village of Dewsbury was a scene of unusual gaiety. Several of the seamen who had recently returned, and whose friends and relations resided in the neighbourhood, with their wives and sweet-hearts, were there assembled to make merry and to enjoy themselves in the best way they could.

A number of the villagers were also present, and it seemed as if it was set apart for a general holiday, to give the brave fellows a hearty welcome home.

To the festivities of the day, Mr. Stubbles had with his usual liberality largely contributed, and himself and his better half were two of the happiest of the guests. The song and the merry dance prevailed, and there was not a sad heart or a sad face to be met with in that humble party.

Notwithstanding the anxiety with which they every day expected the arrival of Harry—they did not imagine that he would give them any further notice—Phoebe and Amy could not resist the temptation to pay a visit to this cheerful scene, especially as they should there meet with some of his old friends and former shipmates, and might

receive some intelligence of him from them which it could not but be interesting for them to know.

Seated in the company of Mr. Stubbles and his wife, they gazed upon the scene of hilarity, and listened to the harmless mirth of the hardy guests with feelings of pleasure, while they were treated with the utmost respect and kindness by every one.

"I ax pardon, Miss Amy, of you and your friend," observed one of the seamen, a true specimen of an English sailor, and who had been one of Harry's shipmates on a former occasion; "I ax pardon for the liberty I'm taking, but you see I am only a rough spoken tar and unused to fine palaver; however, I must say that it does one's heart good to be honoured by the presence of the fair craft, especially the sister and the sweetheart of one of the bravest fellows in the British navy."

Phoebe and Amy smiled at the simple but honest observations of the sailor, while they could not but feel grateful for the praise he had so warmly bestowed upon one so dear to them, and they expressed themselves accordingly.

"Now I warrant that you are waiting with throbbing and anxious hearts Harry's arrival," he continued, "but fear not, Harry will be alongside of you shortly, and as soon as he is allowed to slip his cable. He is quite well and hearty I can assure you, for I saw him in the Downs, and I shouldn't wonder if he is now on his way hither, full sail."

Our heroine and her companion again returned their thanks, and the seaman returned to his companions.

The sports continued, and Phoebe and Amy remained in the society of Mr. and Mrs. Stubbles, their minds filled with flattering hopes and expectations which were strengthened by the observations of the sailor.

Some little interruption and curiosity was caused by the sudden appearance of the village postman, who was a little bustling man, of no inconsiderable self-importance, and approaching Phoebe and Amy, he placed a letter in the hand of the former, observing.

"That be for you, Miss Mayfield, as you see, and I only hope that it may bring you good news."

The hearts of Phoebe and Amy palpitated when they saw the well-known and beloved hand-writing and knew that the letter was from Harry.

They drew aside from the guests to peruse the contents, and the joy that animated their breasts may be imagined when it informed them that Harry had left the ship, was on his way home, and might be expected to arrive that day by coach.

They could not conceal their emotions at this joyful intelligence, which they communicated to Mr. and Mrs. Stubbles, and then retired with them to the private parlour of the inn, where they could the better converse upon the subject.

Mr. Stubbles and his wife congratulated them, and after some little conversation Phoebe and her companion took leave of the company, and hastened to return home, in order to prepare themselves for the happy and important meeting which they trusted was so shortly to take place.

On their way back to the cottage, they gave free vent to their feelings, and tears of joy and gratitude chased each other down their fair cheeks.

"My dear brother," said Amy, "how thankful should we feel to that All merciful providence which has heard our prayers, and preserved him from all those dangers he has had to encounter, and restored him to our arms. The happiness of this meeting will fully repay us for all the cares and anxieties we have had to endure."

"True, true," coincided Phoebe, "and it is impossible that I can give adequate expression to the blissful feelings that now animate my breast. Dear, faithful Harry, may this be the commencement of a new era of happiness in our lives."

They had now reached the cottage, and awaited the arrival of the happy moment with the utmost impatience.

Our heroine and Amy had scarcely quitted the inn five minutes, when the sound of the mail guard's horn was heard, followed by a hearty shout, and the coach was seen rolling swiftly along the road towards the inn, and the guests all quickly directed their attention towards it, among the rest, Mr. and Mrs. Stubbles most anxiously, for they anticipated the arrival by it of Harry Ashford, after the letter which had been received from him.

They were not disappointed; for the fine manly form of the handsome young mariner, accompanied by two of his shipmates, seated outside the coach immediately met the sight, and was greeted with a hearty cheer from the company, which was returned by another from Harry and the two sailors who were with him, and when the coach stopped at the door of the inn, he alighted, and was welcomed by all in the most cordial manner.

Mr. Stubbles and his wife shook him most heartily by the hand, and Harry's looks sufficiently showed how warmly and sincerely he reciprocated their feelings.

"My kind friends," he said, "how can I properly express my pleasure at once more treading my native land, the happy shores of old England, and being surrounded by the familiar faces of those old particulars whom

I have so much cause to esteem. But my heart is too full at this moment for words."

"Bless you, Master Harry," said the kind-hearted Mr. Stubbles, again warmly pressing his hand, "I am as happy as if you were my own brother at seeing you again. But there are others so dear to you whose hearts throb to embrace you, and who—"

"Ah!" interrupted Harry, eagerly, and his countenance glowing with uncontrollable emotion; "my beloved Phoebe, my dearest sister, oh, tell me, I pray you, keep me not in suspense, are those fond, cherished beings who have been the constant objects of my thoughts while dashed upon the foaming billows, or in the fierce battle's deadly strife, has heaven mercifully watched over their safety, during my absence? Are they well? Are they—"

"They are all that you can wish them," interrupted Mr. Stubbles; "it is not many minutes since they were here, and received your letter, they now anxiously await your arrival at the cottage."

"Let me not delay the bliss that is in store for me a moment," he exclaimed, with increased agitation; "beloved beings, how overwhelming will be the joy of this meeting. Farewell, my friends. I must away."

With these words, amidst the cheers of the numerous persons assembled, the young seaman hurried away towards the cottage, his heart swelling with emotions that were too powerful for utterance.

As he proceeded, he hailed every object so familiar to him with the greatest pleasure, they brought back to his memory the happy days of childhood, but even pleasing as were these reminiscences, they were not unassociated with many melancholy feelings of regret.

But one reflection completely superseded every other thought, and that was the merciful preservation of his beloved Phoebe and his sister from every harm during the time that he had been separated from them, and they had been deprived of his protection, and he could never be sufficiently grateful to providence for it, or to those kind friends, to whose sympathy and attention he had also no doubt they were much indebted.

One thing, however, in the excitement of the moment, and his anxiety and impatience to behold Phoebe and his sister, which had entirely escaped his memory—although his solicitude was none the less on that account—and that was to inquire of Mr. Stubbles after poor old Mark Mayfield. He could not but feel the greatest uneasiness on that subject, for on the result of the unfortunate man's malady he knew the completion of the future happiness of Phoebe depended, and should he die without the light of reason again dawning upon his intellect, so that he

might be fully awakened to the conviction that his hapless daughter had been the victim of the most cruel treachery and injustice, and pronounce her forgiveness, he shuddered to think of the consequences.

He would fain hope that the poor old man had recovered since he had been away, and that the desired reconciliation, and upon which so much depended, had been effected, so that the last declining days of Mark were those of tranquillity if not happiness, but when he recollected the melancholy and hopeless condition in which he had left him on his departure from England, he dared not expect the realisation of those wishes, and he almost dreaded to question Phoebe upon the painful subject.

These were the thoughts that passed hurriedly in the young seaman's mind as he returned to that humble but comfortable home from which he had been so long absent, and he pictured to himself in the most glaring colours the happiness that awaited him, and the thoughts that swelled the bosoms of Phoebe and Amy at that moment.

"Dear, dear girls," he ejaculated; "what constant hopes, and doubts, and fears must have agitated your gentle and affectionate bosoms during the time that I was away and exposed to all the perils of the ocean. How oft in my busy imagination have I pictured your pale cheeks, your anxious looks, your tear-dimmed eyes, as my name arose with a blessing to your lips, and a fervent prayer to heaven for my welfare, and such thoughts have strengthened and encouraged me in the hour of danger, and revived those fond hopes that otherwise must have perished. And now oh, what must be your feelings of rapture, emulating those that agitate my breast, and almost unman me."

The further he proceeded, everything seemed to wear a still more bright and cheerful aspect, lighted up by the golden beams of a summer's sun.

"Dear happy scenes of childhood," he soliloquised, as he gazed eagerly and fondly upon every well remembered object around; "with what feelings of unspeakable delight do I once more gaze upon ye, and return to your peaceful haunts from which I hope never more to be estranged. Yonder is the grassy hill, up which Phoebe and myself in the days of our early youth, and ere care had cast its shadows upon our hearts, have so often gambolled in innocent play, there the shady walk along which we sauntered on many a pleasant summer eve, and where first our vows of love were breathed. There stands the village church, with its ivy mantled pinnacle, there is the silvery streamlet, and the old water-mill, and yonder, just peeping



through the clustering trees in the distance, the now deserted but once happy cot where Phoebe was born. Oh, there is not an object, not a spot, that does not recal some precious, some cherished remembrance. Beloved scenes, ever, ever so fondly endeared to my heart, I greet, I welcome you once more, and dare hope again to realise that happiness I once experienced amongst ye."

His heart throbbed with every generous and manly feeling as he gave utterance to these words, and he paused for a minute or two to gaze with pleasure and admiration around him. But chiding himself for his delay, he again proceeded, and at length came in sight of that happy home where such throbbing hearts and anxious bosoms were waiting to receive and welcome him; and there again his powerful emotions com-

pelled him to stop, and to give vent to the bewildering thoughts that crowded upon his excited brain. He almost shrunk, notwithstanding his anxiety, from the joyful task which was imposed upon him. But at length with blessings upon his lips, and his heart bounding with gratitude to heaven for permitting him to return in safety, he gently approached the cottage-door, which was standing partially open, and listened with breathless attention to catch the least sound of the dear voices of its inmates.

They were conversing, and every silvery tone fell upon his enraptured ears like heavenly music. He heard them mention his name in words of the purest, the most fervent affection. He could delay his happiness no longer, but with an exclamation of indescribable transport, he threw open the

door, and once more stood in the presence of Phoebe and his sister.

There was one loud cry of uncontrollable joy escaped the lips of the fair and gentle beings, and the next instant they were clasped with half frantic delight to the bosom of that fond being from whom they had been so long separated.

CHAPTER LX.

AFFECTIONATE GREETINGS.

What a scene was that which followed; we must leave it to the imagination of the reader, for it is utterly impossible to do adequate justice to it by description. For some minutes Harry held his sister and Phoebe in his arms, manly tears trembling in his eyes, and which he had no power to restrain, while sighs and sobs alone escaped their bosoms, and completely choked their utterance.

At length Phoebe and Amy gently disengaging themselves from his embrace, sunk on their knees, and with clasped hands and upraised eyes, mentally offered up their thanks to heaven.

After a brief interval thus occupied, our hero raised them, and again clasped them to his bosom, and for a few minutes they all three gave unrestrained indulgence to their feelings.

At length they became more composed, and could talk with comparative calmness, and then what observations of affection, and expressions of gratitude for their restoration to each other, were exchanged between them. What mutual explanations had they to give how much to relate, and thus the hours on that auspicious day passed quickly away, and happiness smiled upon them.

Never had Phoebe appeared half so beautiful to Harry as she did on that occasion; and his heart throbbed with increased love and admiration as he gazed upon her, while the crimson blushes that suffused her cheeks and the soft sighs that escaped her bosom as she caught his eyes fixed so fondly upon her, revealing to her the thoughts that were passing in his mind, showed how ardently she reciprocated his feelings.

The only drawback to their happiness was the still deplorable situation of Mark Mayfield, and Harry listened to the particulars of all that had happened to him since he had been away with the most sincere and melancholy feelings of regret. But still he endeavoured to comfort Phoebe under the painful circumstances, and to inspire her with hope.

"Poor old man," he observed, "terrible

indeed have been his sufferings, and it is melancholy to reflect upon them, still I cannot banish the idea from my mind that he will yet, with all the care and attention that will continue to be bestowed upon him, and by the merciful interposition of providence, ultimately recover, and that all our anxious wishes will be accomplished."

"I often try to flatter myself with that fond hope," said Phoebe, in reply, "but when I reflect upon the dread, the repugnance, nay, even horror with which he ever seems to view me when I venture to visit him, my hopes vanish, and I cannot but look upon the future with a feeling bordering upon terror. Unfortunate parent, how little did your virtues deserve so wretched a fate as that which it has been your lot so long to have to endure."

Finding that it was likely to create the most dismal and torturing feelings, even on this happy occasion, Harry changed the subject, and after giving a vivid description of his adventures at sea, and his frequent hairbreadth escapes, he drew a bright picture of the future that his sanguine imagination suggested, and to which Phoebe and Amy listened with mingled feelings of hopes and fears.

Having thus passed away some of the happiest hours that he had ever enjoyed, and thinking that it would be better to leave his sister and Phoebe to themselves for a short time, in order that they might endeavour to regain in some measure their composure, Harry quitted the cottage, and hastened to rejoin the merry party at the inn, among which was many of his oldest friends and acquaintances, and his return was hailed with every demonstration of pleasure and welcome.

Never had the heart of the young seaman felt more light and joyous, and he joined merrily in the sports, and was the very soul and spirit of the jovial guests assembled. The entertainments were kept up with unabated vivacity, being at the same time conducted with every propriety, and universal happiness marked the sailor's return.

In the evening Phoebe and Amy, who had felt dull without the society of Harry, rejoined the revellers, and after a short time passed in the most cheerful manner, they were induced by Mr. and Mrs. Stubbles to accompany them to their residence to supper, although it was not without an irresistible feeling of melancholy that they did so, when they thought of the poor old man who found an asylum with them there, and whose deplorable affliction excluded him from every ray of happiness.

On arriving at the house it was necessary that they should pass the door of the chamber occupied by the patient, and with feelings

of the most painful description they paused to listen, fearful to enter lest their abrupt appearance might cause one of those wild paroxysms which were so agonising to witness.

The heart of Phoebe palpitated violently, and tears trembled in her eyes, whilst the emotions of her lover were scarcely less painful than her own.

All, however, was perfectly silent in the chamber, and imagining that the old man slept, anxious even as Harry was once more to behold him, he was endeavouring to persuade Phoebe to retire, when a murmuring sound was heard, evidently in the voice of Mark, and which rivetted their whole attention, and after another brief pause it was followed by a few broken sentences, the purport of which they could not catch, then succeeded a wild laugh, which thrilled through their veins, and once more for a second or two all was still.

Presently, however, and before the listeners had time to recover themselves, the unfortunate sufferer was heard to sing, in a low, plaintive voice, one of his old songs, but the strange and almost unearthly tones in which he sung it, were enough to move even the most insensible heart to pity, and Phoebe and Amy could not restrain their bitter sobs and tears of anguish.

He ceased; the same silence as before ensued, which was only broken by the footsteps, as they imagined, of the keeper in the room, at intervals, then succeeded a heavy breathing sound, which led them to suppose that the old man had again fallen off to sleep, and by the persuasion of Mr. Stubbles Phoebe, who in the agony of her feelings had been compelled to lean on the arm of Harry for support, was withdrawn from the door of the chamber, and they retired to the sitting-room, their feelings most painfully excited by what they had overheard, and from which it was some time ere they could recover themselves.

Phoebe was, however, at length consoled by the assurance that every attention was paid to her afflicted parent's case, and Henry warmly thanked Mr. Stubbles for the humanity which had prompted him to undertake so onerous and melancholy a task, and which he yet ventured to hope would ultimately be attended with the most favourable results, at the same time he expressed a determination to see the wretched man at the earliest opportunity. After some time passed in conversation, Harry and his fair companions returned home, and shortly separated for the night, with feelings of happiness such as they had not experienced for many months.

Happy indeed were the dreams that arose to the imagination of Henry Ashford that

night; bright visions of the future, created by the confidence of the sincerity and devotion of Phoebe's love, and the anticipation of the speedy realisation of all their fondest hopes and wishes. Still his most anxious thoughts were excited for the recovery of Mark, and he could not help giving way to some misgivings on that dismal subject.

The next day was passed by Henry, his sister, and Phoebe in the most agreeable manner, in paying visits to their numerous friends, and receiving their congratulations, and in a few days all began to experience a large quantity of that tranquillity and happiness which was their lot in former days, and hope, bright hope still cheered them on. But other events of a painful nature were brooding in the web of fate, which we will proceed to relate in the succeeding chapters.

CHAPTER LXI.

IMPORTANT EVENTS.

Several weeks flew quickly by after the return of Harry Ashford from sea, without anything important taking place, and cheered and consoled by his society and that of the gentle Amy, Phoebe became contented and somewhat hopeful, if not completely happy. In fact, it was impossible that she could be so, until it might please providence to restore the reason of her father, of which, however, the medical gentlemen who had him under their treatment, now, from the symptoms that showed themselves, now expressed some hopes.

The reader will probably like to know what befel Beaufort after his meeting with the friendly Indians on the island. He remained with them for some weeks, and was treated by them with every kindness. Still he felt a longing desire to be able to leave the island, and meeting with some ship, work his passage to England, where he hoped to avoid detection, and by putting several projects that he had in contemplation into execution, to redeem in some measure his broken fortunes.

Every day he proceeded to that point of the island from which he could command a view of the sea, with the hope of beholding some approaching ship; but for some time he was doomed to disappointment.

However, going one morning rather earlier than usual towards his usual place of watching, he was suddenly agreeably surprised at hearing the voices of men, who spoke in the English language, at a short distance, and pausing for a moment four seamen appeared in sight, approaching the spot where he stood.

At first, from the position in which he stood, being partly concealed by the shadow of some trees, they did not seem to observe him, and he had therefore an opportunity of scrutinising them more minutely, and from their appearance his idea was confirmed, namely, that they were Englishmen.

They were laughing heartily, appearing to be in the best of humours, and that further encouraged him. But when they came nearer, and saw him, they started, and seemed hardly to be able to conclude what countryman he was, for he was partly dressed in the rude clothes which he had received from the Indians, when they met him, he being nearly naked at that time.

However, he soon satisfied them by approaching them nearer, and addressing them in his native tongue, imploring their pity and assistance, briefly informing them that he had been cast on the island after a miraculous escape from a ship destroyed by fire.

This tale which they had no reason to doubt was true, immediately excited the sympathy of the seamen, who then informed him that they belonged to an English trading vessel, which having touched at the island only an hour or so before, and that being in want of water they had been sent on shore in search of it. They furthermore undertook to promise him a kind reception on board, but having told them of the treatment he had received from the friendly Indians, and expressing a wish to bid them farewell before he departed, the sailors agreed to accompany him to their wigwams, and he immediately conducted them in that direction.

Beaufort, as has frequently been shown, knew well how to play the hypocrite and to conceal his real character from the least shadow of suspicion; and in this the nature of the manners he could assume from his gentlemanly origin, and the education he had received, greatly assisted him. It is no wonder therefore that he quickly won the confidence of the seamen, who warmly expressed their sympathy towards him, and their satisfaction that accident had thus brought them to his deliverance; and the feelings of Beaufort at the fortunate occurrence may be imagined.

The Indians on seeing Beaufort approach, accompanied by four men, evinced some suspicion that wrong was intended, but he soon assured them of the contrary, and briefly stated the particulars of the case, telling them that he was about to leave them.

They expressed, through the means of their interpreter—the one who spoke sufficient of English to be understood—their regret of this, as they had taken a particular fancy to Beaufort, and had hoped that he would continue to reside among them; at the same time they congratulated him on his

good fortune, as he seemed to have such a longing wish to return to his own country, and they gave the seamen a hearty welcome, inviting them to partake of such fare as their means could supply them with; to which the sailors, to show their friendly feeling, complied, merely tasting of the provisions that were placed before them.

In return for this the seamen presented them with two or three pocket-knives, and some beads and trinkets of no value, which they happened to have about them, and with which the Indians appeared to be much delighted.

After some little delay, the sailors urged the necessity of their return to the ship; and Beaufort having bade adieu to all the others who gathered before their wigwams for that purpose, accompanied by the Indians whom he had first met on the island, and who expressed a wish to see him depart, they quitted the village, and made their way towards the spot where Beaufort had first landed.

On arriving there, he saw the boat in the care of another sailor, and at a short distance the vessel awaiting their return, and after bidding the Indians a friendly farewell, with the sailors, Beaufort entered the boat, which immediately put off from the island, the Indians continuing to watch it with anxious interest till it came alongside the ship.

The sailors having briefly stated the particulars of his misfortunes, and the manner in which they had found him, Beaufort was well received by the captain, and quickly supplied with all the necessities he required, for which he expressed himself, and really felt very grateful, especially when he learnt that the vessel was bound to England.

He now found himself once more in safety, and nothing could exceed his exultation. It might have been expected that so many merciful interpositions of providence for so unworthy and guilty a man, would have worked a favourable change in his mind, and awakened him to remorse; but no, villainy was engrafted on his nature, he scorned the idea of penitence as puerile and contemptible, and looked forward to his return to England with anxiety, only as the means of carrying out the same nefarious designs as had hitherto marked his guilty career, and something seemed to tell him that he should be successful.

"Yes," he soliloquised, "fortune and me have been for some time at variance, and I have had to endure all the ill-luck that any poor devil could have to encounter, but *nil desperandum*, the fickle dame I have no doubt will once more assume her brightest smiles, and it shall not be my fault if I do not amply make up for the past. Repentance—psna! what use is it preaching of that

to a man whose character is gone, and who wears the felon's brand? I am no drivelling fool, and therefore heed not such canting nonsense. I must have money, and the time is past when I might have felt particular as to the means of obtaining it. Let me but once more reach England's shores, and I will commence a new career that shall put money in my purse at any cost, or I will know the reason why."

Such were the guilty thoughts of the hardened Beaufort, and he was determined that at all hazards they should be realised. He had no fear of detection, for he had long since formed a plan which he thought would effectually avoid that, and he determined to enter upon all his schemes boldly, recklessly, and to hesitate at nothing whatever which might serve to accomplish his wishes.

He often reflected upon the probability of Lord Selborne having escaped after the fire on board the ship, and when he did so it was with a deadly feeling of malice, and a determination to make him the victim once more of his cupidity, should he be so fortunate as ever to encounter him again, which something seemed to assure him that he would.

As he had done before on board the ill-fated ship by which he had been rescued from his perilous situation, he contrived so well to conceal his real character, that he ingratiated himself into the good opinion of all on board, and he having acquired a perfect knowledge of nautical matters, he was not only looked upon as a worthy, kind-hearted, jovial fellow, but as a good seaman, and received many flattering compliments from the captain to that effect, who promised him full pay for his services on the voyage home. This was most welcome to Beaufort, as it would give him a fair start on landing, and give him the means of carrying his guilty schemes into execution.

No accident occurred on the voyage, and in due time the ship arrived at Portsmouth, and Beaufort having received his pay as promised, accompanied several of his shipmates on shore, time having so changed his appearance, and his present nautical disguise being so complete, that he had not the least fear of recognition, should he happen to meet with any one that he knew, and by whom it would not be convenient that he should be known.

They went to a tavern usually frequented by sailors, where the grog was soon on board, the yarn was spun, the song went merrily round, and all was mirth and hilarity, in which none seemed to join more heartily than Beaufort; but he had a nefarious design in contemplation, which he was resolved to carry into effect if possible. This was the robbery of one or two of his companions,

when they should become overpowered with liquor, and then to decamp and make his way to London with all the expedition possible.

The grog came in in abundance, of which Beaufort took good care only to partake sparingly, although he pretended to do so freely, and the sailors were soon in the midst of their glory, and most boisterous in their mirth. One, who sat near the villain Beaufort, was so completely overcome by the deep libations he had taken, that his head dropped powerless on the table, and he sunk into a state of stupefaction.

Of this Beaufort took advantage to commence his nefarious operations, and watching his opportunity when no one was observing him, he possessed himself very adroitly of the sailor's well-filled purse, and immediately shifted his seat, shortly afterwards retiring to the outside of the house, where a mixed party of sailors and landmen, with a fair sprinkling of females of the lowest grade, were regaling themselves, the host, a red-faced, podgy-looking man, making one of the most jovial amongst them.

There was one individual present who particularly attracted the attention and curiosity of Beaufort, and indeed so much so that he could not remove his eyes from him.

This was a dapper little man, dressed in the most extravagant, flashy style, who was seated at one of the tables, with a female on each knee, but in such a position that Beaufort could not observe his features. He was singing, or rather humming the burthen of a low song, and the tones of his voice seemed very familiar to Beaufort, and added to his curiosity.

The landlord, as well as his guests—particularly the female portion—seemed to pay much deference to this person, and were evidently disposed to applaud and admire everything he did or said, which was probably to be accounted for more for the liberality with which he spent his money than from any sincere respect they entertained for him.

"So, Mr. Joe Trapps," observed the landlord, addressing the individual just mentioned, "you're going to leave me, are you?"

"Vhy, yes," replied Trapps, as he was called, "yer see, business of importance calls me to London this very day, and I'm off as soon as the coach arrives."

"I'm sorry for it, Joe," said the landlord, "for you're such a merry fellow, and spend your money so freely, that we shall scarcely know what to do without you."

"Vell," returned Joe, "I fancy that few know how to do the amiable and the gentlemanly better than Joe Trapps. He is always ready for anything, to crack a joke, or crack a bottle; to sing, dance, drink, or fight; in short, nothing comes amiss to Joe Trapps."

Hows'ever, yer know the best of friends must part, consequently I must leave you, as I said afore; but I dare say it won't be long afore I shall see you again."

Beaufort had listened with breathless attention to every word of this speech, and the tones of the voice struck him more forcibly than before. Surely he could not be mistaken. He walked round to a seat immediately opposite Joe Trapps, so that he might have a full view of his features, and he started and could hardly refrain from giving expression to an exclamation of surprise and gratification, for, in spite of a large pair of bushy whiskers, he immediately recognised in the features of the pretended Joe Trapps, those of his old particular, and associate in crime, Sam Filcher.

At first Sam either did not observe him, or did not appear to take any notice of him, but Beaufort shifted nearer to him, and his female companions having left him, he turned his attention upon him; their eyes met, and it was evident, notwithstanding the strange alteration in the appearance of Beaufort, that Filcher also recognised him.

They exchanged significant glances enjoining to silence, and Sam watching the opportunity when no one could observe or overhear him, he whispered to Beaufort—

"Meet me in the out-house at the back of the tavern in half an hour. Mind, be cautious."

"All right," whispered Beaufort, in reply, "I will be there."

They then rejoined their own companions, and appeared to take no notice of each other.

Beaufort whose astonishment may be conceived, hailed this meeting as one of the most fortunate that could have occurred under the present circumstances, especially as Sam Filcher, to judge from his appearance and display of liberality, seemed to be in no want of money; and he considered it a good omen of his future success in the guilty plans he had drawn out for himself.

In a few minutes Sam quitted the table, and retired into the house, and Beaufort continued to keep the company he had joined in till the time appointed had nearly arrived, when making some excuse he walked away, and sought the old out-house attached to the back of the tavern mentioned by Filcher.

He was not there, and Beaufort, after waiting some minutes, began to grow impatient, and to imagine that Sam had deceived him, when he heard footsteps approaching, and presently afterwards Filcher looked in cautiously, and perceiving that Beaufort was there entered, and closed the door after him.

"Filcher," said Beaufort, "is it possible?"

"Vot, the captain," replied the former,

vell, I never, this is a most lucky and extraordinary meeting. Who'd have thought it?"

"True," said Beaufort; "but think you that the affair of my escaping from the hulks is blown over?"

"No doubt of it," said Sam, "though it was rather uncivil of you, I must say, to depart and leave your old friend in limbo."

"It could not be helped; but how is it I see you at liberty before your time has expired?"

"Oh," answered Sam, "I was discharged honourably before my time, in consequence of my good behaviour."

Beaufort smiled.

"Well," he observed, "I need not say how happy I am to see you again, Sam, and looking so well; you seem to have fared much better than myself. What game are you now pursuing?"

"You need not ask that question, captain—it is the old one to be sure. Some time ago I met with an extraordinary windfall, so I changed my name to that of Joe Trapps, which was that of one of my old friends, and togging myself to the best advantage, I have been leading the life of a gentleman ever since. Hows'ever, I am nearly run to seed, so I'm off to London to see whether I cannot replenish my purse."

"A wise resolution; but you will not desert an old friend?"

"Not never," replied Sam, emphatically, "Sam Filcher was never the man to be ungrateful. You and I have seen some life together, Captain—though you are not quite all brandy now as you used to be—and I hope we shall see a great deal more yet, before the last day of reck'ning comes, and we reach that helyvated position, don't they call it, which—"

"Silence," interrupted Beaufort, hastily, and shuddering.

"Vell," observed Filcher, coolly, "it's not a very pleasant subject to refer to, certainly, but it's what must come one day or other, as a matter of course, that's certain. I've made up my mind to it. But I say, captain, how is it I see you in your present character?"

"There is no time to explain now, but I will at some future time. So you go this day to London?"

"Yes."

"And I am to be your companion?"

"To be sure you are. And hark ye, captain, I fancy you will find some profitable business for you on our arrival there."

"What mean you?"

"Lord Selborne."

"Ah! what of him?"

"Why," answered Sam, "I seed in a newspaper yesterday, among the fashionable intelligence, which in course I always reads, that Lord Selborne had arrived at his mansion in

St. James's Square, from the Continent, after his return from America."

"Then he was saved," exclaimed Beaufort, with a mingled look of satisfaction and malice, "this is indeed most fortunate. If I only act with caution, I shall have him completely in my power."

"I suppose that refers to the secret contained in those papers that fell into the hands of that precious beadle in the country, captain?"

"True."

"In course, as I always did, I share in the profits of this business?"

"You shall have no cause to complain if I meet with success," answered Beaufort.

"All right," said his companion. "I have other news which I've no doubt will be welcome to you."

"Name it."

"I have learnt that your old particular, Amy Ashford, is residing in her native village."

"Psha!" returned Beaufort, impatiently, "I care nothing about that cold, insensible beauty now. I have other game to pursue."

"But Phoebe Mayfield?"

"Ah, could I ascertain whether or not she is living."

"She is, and under the same roof as Amy Ashford."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Positive. Her and Amy's brother are reconciled, and as soon as Harry Ashford returns from sea, it is said they are to be married."

"They must not make too sure of that. But how do you know all this?"

"I learnt it in the village of Dewsbury," replied Filcher, "which I visited a short time since, knowing that no one would discover me in my present disguise."

"Tis well," said Beaufort, with a look of satisfaction, "then the success of my plans is all but certain."

"Vell," remarked Sam, "then as this explanation has taken place, I think we had better separate now, and it would be better that we should not be seen together. The coach will be here shortly, and I shall depart and—"

"Of course, I shall accompany you."

"No, that won't do."

"Why not?"

"It might tell tales."

"Why, Sam," said Beaufort, with a laugh, "how remarkably precautions you have become of late."

"In course I am," returned Filcher, "and always was."

"Well what do you propose?"

"This here. I shall go with the coach to the end of the first stage. I shall stop at The Jolly Travellers, and wait for you."

"Rather an expensive way of travelling, and I don't see the use of it."

"Don't you? Well, I do, so let me have my way."

"Well, be it so. But you do not intend to deceive me?"

"Oh, honour, honour, you hurt my feelings by the 'sinevation,'" replied the impudent and facetious scamp. "Did any one ever know Sam Filcher, the Sprig o' Myrtle, as fit Hookem Snivey, guilty of a dirty or ungentlemanly action, 'specially towards an old pal?"

"Ha, ha, ha! your still the same Sam Filcher that you ever were."

"In course I am."

"Well, it is a most fortunate thing that we have met," said Beaufort, "and, if what you have told me is the truth, only remain faithful to me, and our fortune's made."

"Hooray," cried Filcher, in a fit of ecstasy, "that's the ticket. I'll stick to yer like bricks, and not no mistake."

"Well then, are we agreed?"

"Yes."

"I'm to follow you as soon as I like, and you'll wait for me at the Jolly Travellers inn?"

"That's it, and there we can talk matters over on the quiet."

"True."

"Do you want any of the rowdy?" said the amiable Mr. Filcher; "I'm not quite cleaned out yet; I've got a few yellow-boys left."

"That's fortunate," said Beaufort, "and they will increase and multiply, no doubt, if we only play our cards well. However, I do not want money myself particularly just now."

"That's better still," returned Sam, "but, hark, there's the coach, so I must be off. Mind, I shall expect you to-morrow at the Jolly Travellers."

"All right, I will not fail to be there, you may be sure."

With these words the worthy pair separated.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE CURSE OF VILLANY.—DEATH OF THE COURTEZAN.

Beaufort saw his guilty associate depart by the coach, and after passing a short time with the persons outside the inn, he walked away a short distance from the spot, in order that he might give free indulgence to the thoughts which this unexpected meeting with Sam Filcher, at a moment so opportune, naturally excited.

"What a fortunate circumstance is this," he soliloquised; "it augurs well for the future. Fortune has not yet entirely deserted me, I find, although I have so experienced her frowns. I ever found Sam Filcher a most invaluable scoundrel, and time seems to have improved him. And then if what he has told me is true, namely that Lord Selborne is in London, and that Phoebe still lives, the success of my designs appear certain. But I must act with the utmost caution, for, one false move, and the game is up. His lordship will be rather astounded at a visit from me, I imagine; for no doubt he supposed that I had perished in the burning ship, and that he was thus rid of me for ever. He will not only find that I am living, but that I am still more rife for mischief than ever. I will so work upon his fears, that he will not dare to refuse to yield to my demands, and having accomplished my ends, I have only to give Sam Filcher the slip, retire on the continent, or to some distant part of the country, and finish my days as a gentleman ought to do. Ha, ha, ha! I see a brilliant prospect before me, and I am confident that my expectations will not end in disappointment."

Such were the guilty hopes in which the villain indulged for some time, when he returned to the inn.

Here all was riot and confusion, the man whom he had robbed had discovered his loss, and having accused several innocent persons, it led to a general fight, which did not seem likely to terminate until some serious mischief was done.

Beaufort found himself in rather a dangerous situation, he having the purse and its contents about him, and he therefore thought it was the wisest plan to decamp at once, lest suspicion should fall upon him, and he did so accordingly, before he was observed by any one, and striking into a bye-road at the back of the house, he hurried along in the dusk of the evening, for some time, at the top of his speed, till at length having gained the end of the road, he branched off in the direction that the coach had taken, intending to proceed as far on the way to the place where him and Sam Filcher had appointed to meet, as he could that night.

As he journeyed on, he continued to reflect, with feelings of no little satisfaction and exultation, upon the favourable change which had taken place in his prospects, and to deliberate upon the schemes of villany he determined, at all hazards, to put into execution, and it was long since he had felt so elated and sanguine in his expectations as he did at present.

"I will no longer live the grovelling life which I have done for some time past," he

muttered to himself; "the once gay and sparkling Captain Beaufort will be himself again in spite of everything. Lord Selborne has abundance of wealth, and a portion of it, I am resolved shall fall to my share. I must, I will have money, or die in the effort to obtain it."

At length, after travelling for about a couple of hours, he came suddenly upon an old fashioned road side inn, which was a very welcome sight to him, as he felt tired, and was resolved therefore to put up there for the night, and pursue his way to The Jolly Travellers in the morning.

His appearance was in no way calculated to excite suspicion, and having plenty of money—which had been a stranger to him for some time—he boldly entered the house, and was quickly accommodated with such refreshment as he required, of which having partaken, and desiring to be called at an early hour in the morning, he quickly retired to rest.

In the morning, soon after daylight, he resumed his journey, at the end of which he arrived in two or three hours, and walking into The Jolly Travellers—which was situated in a market town—he inquired, as Sam Filcher had instructed him to do, as he was well known to the landlord by that name, for Mr. Trapps.

"You are the person then whom Mr. Joe Trapps expected, I presume?" said the landlord, eyeing Beaufort from top to toe, a kind of scrutiny which he did not much approve of, but of which he took no notice."

To the landlord's question he replied in the affirmative.

"Well," said the former, "he has only gone out for a bit of a walk, but he will be back presently. What shall I bring you?"

"A good stiff glass of grog," replied Beaufort, maintaining the sailor's character, "and, harkye, my old skipper, it must be none of your three water tackle, d'ye hear?"

"All right," answered the landlord, "and I'll warrant you'll not find such grog in the country as you will at The Jolly Travellers."

The landlord departed to fulfil the order of his guest, and quickly returned, not only with the grog, but also accompanied by Sam Filcher.

"Ah, Binnacle, my old friend," exclaimed Sam Filcher, grasping Beaufort's hand, at the same time winking his eye significantly, unobserved by the landlord, "I'm glad to see you. Master Tapster, you can retire, if you please, for me and my friend Ben have some private business together."

The landlord obeyed, at the same time Beaufort could not help imagining that he eyed them both with a singular look of suspicion.

"You've kept your word," said Beaufort, he



"In course I have; you didn't expect I was going to break it, did you?" said Sam Filcher.

"'Tis well; we understand each other."

"I should think so. We ought to do. So now to business."

"The landlord seems to know you well," observed Beaufort, "but I did not half like his looks. He seemed to eye us both with suspicion."

"Well, I'll tell yer, captain," replied Sam; "old Tapster is one of us; since you have been away I have done a good deal on the road, and many a job he has put me fly to, knowing that I never acted sbabby for the information. I dare say, now, that he fancies you're a reg'lar tar, just returned from sea with plenty of rowdy, and that I'm going to make a wictim of you."

No. 28.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Beaufort; "but what do you propose?"

"That we stay here to-day, and depart at night," answered Filcher; "we had better do the journey on foot, for there's no knowing what luck might turn up on the road, eh?"

"True; but I am anxious to reach London and see his lordship as soon as possible, so that there may be no delay in the business."

"All right," said Sam; "and I say, captain, I think it would be as well for you to change your toggs, when we get there, for a more fashionable suit, as you intend to pay your respects to von of the *area-stocracy*, eh?"

"True," answered Beaufort, "that is not a bad suggestion, Sam."

"And so you think as how his lordship will come down handsome to keep dark what you know," said Sam.

"He dare not refuse; but we will talk more upon that subject anon."

To this Filcher agreed, and having called for refreshments they were again left to themselves.

They passed the day away in relating to each other the different adventures they had met with since they had been separated, and in arranging their guilty plans, and in the evening took their departure from the inn, pursuing their journey on foot.

A storm came on after they had been travelling for some time, and the misfortune was, as Sam Filcher informed his companion they were some miles from any town or village, where they might procure shelter, and they now regretted that they had quitted the Jolly Travellers, Beaufort, who was in no very agreeable humour, laying all the blame upon the shoulders of Filcher for the suggestion, and which that amiable gentleman bore with the most exemplary patience and forbearance.

They were in an open part of the country, so that there was nothing in the least to shelter them from the rain, which came down in torrents, the wind at the same time blowing a perfect hurricane.

They were soon drenched to the skin, but while Beaufort gave vent to his rage in repeated curses, Sam bore it with the utmost coolness and indifference, and seemed rather to enjoy it than otherwise, humming a flash song and whistling by turns.

"Fool," said Beaufort at last, passionately, "are you trying to mock me? What is there to excite your mirth in such a confounded storm as this?"

"Wot's the use of crying about it, captain?" returned Filcher, "yer see I didn't like it at first, but now I'm wet through I don't mind it."

"Bah," said Beaufort, surlily, "no more of this foolery. Know you not of any place where we may find accommodation for the night?"

"Yes," answered the facetious Sam, with a broad grin overspreading his ugly features, "the next village we come to, which, as near as I can guess, is not much more than four miles from this here blessed spot."

"Damn you!" exclaimed Beaufort, clenching his fist in a menacing manner, and evidently half disposed to deal him a blow, but Sam Filcher only grinned more frightfully than before, and seemed to endeavour to impress upon his companion's mind that "the Sprig of Myrtle, him as *fit* Hookem Snivey," was not the sort of man to be intimidated. So Beaufort wisely, it probably might be considered, took a second thought, and con-

tented himself with a growl, and then a volley of oaths, which had no other effect than to excite the humour of Mr. Filcher the more.

The storm became more fierce than ever, and Beaufort's rage kept full pace with it. The elements themselves were certainly not more angry than he was, and Sam Filcher's mirth rose in an equal ratio, for which it would be utterly impossible to attempt to account, seeing that it was such a night as even the most uncharitable and malicious person would not have wished their greatest enemy to be out in.

They now entered a lane, dark and dreary, except when at intervals it was illumined by the broad vivid glare of the sheet-lightning, which only served to render more visible the utter misery and hopelessness of their situation.

"Where does this damned lane lead to?" demanded Beaufort, in the same surly tones.

"Not knowing, can't say," was the answer of Filcher, with another broad grin, accompanied by a whistle of the most perfect indifference, "somewhere, or nowhere, just as it happens, I s'pose. Come, I say, captain, don't drop down on your luck at this here trifle, it's unworthy of a military man, I meant to say. 'Ve took precious good care to be pretty wet inside afore 've left the Jolly Travellers—and arn't 've jolly travellers now?—so I means to say as how 've oughtn't to grumble at being a little wet outside."

Another oath rewarded this rally of vulgar wit on the part of Sam, and Beaufort finding that it was no use endeavouring to elicit anything like information or consolation from him, relapsed into sullen silence, broken at intervals only by curses on Sam and the weather in particular.

They had now nearly reached the extremity of the lane, when there was another broad glare of lightning, and Sam Filcher gave an extra whistle in a shrill note, and slapped his thigh in an apparent state of the highest gratification.

"What's the matter now, fool?" interrogated Beaufort, peremptorily.

"Vhy, didn't you see?"

"See what?"

"That here blessed, precious, welcome sight."

"What do you mean?"

"There. All right. Travellers taken in and done for."

"There was another vivid flash, and Beaufort straining his eyes in the direction to which Sam pointed, beheld what appeared to be the outlines of some building at the end of the lane.

"Have you any idea what that is, Sam?" he eagerly demanded.

"Why," answered Sam, "it certainly is neither a tree nor a bush, nor a horse nor an ass, but if I must be allowed to give my candid opinion, I should take it to be some kind of a building where any poor devils, exposed to such a storm as this, might contrive to find a shelter."

This opinion perfectly coincided with the one which Beaufort had himself formed, so they pushed on their way, and quickly arriving at the end of the lane, had the satisfaction to find their surmises confirmed.

It was an old ruined brick building, without doors or windows, but which at some remote period might probably have been used as a dwelling house, in spite of its lonely situation.

The entrances were half blocked with rubbish, and the wind howled dismally through the ruinous and long deserted chambers.

"This here is not von of the most lively looking places, captain," observed Filcher; "but as you nautical seamen say, any port in a storm. So, here goes, there's no one to object to our entrance except it be the owls and the rats, and all sich like warmint, and them ve doesn't mind. Come along, govner, I'll lead the way."

Beaufort returned no answer to these observations, but followed Filcher over the heaps of rubbish, and through the lank grass into the interior of the building, which presented an aspect sufficiently cheerless and uninviting, the flooring of the upper stories having given way and fallen, revealing the roof, broken in many places, and freely admitting the wind and the rain.

Sam scrambled his way, closely followed by Beaufort, to a heap of rubbish in one corner, that was sheltered from the rain, on which he contentedly seated himself, inviting his surly companion to do the same.

"Vell, here ve are safely housed at last, though perhaps not in the best of quarters," he remarked, "and as this precious storm does not seem likely to leave off to-night, vhy, vot I've got to say is, ve may as vell make our miserable lives happy."

"Curse you for a thoughtless fool in advising that we should leave the inn till the morning; we should have been comfortably in bed before this."

"No doubt of it," returned Sam, "but vot's the use of blaming me? If I vos a fool for giving advice which I thought vos for the best, vot vos you for follering it?"

"Bah!"

"Vell, its no use complainin', it can't be helped now; for my own part, I'm of a happy, contented disposition, and never yet out of temper about trifles. Come, captain, although this here is not exactly a palace, and this old rubbish is not quite so pleasant

and comfortable to lie upon as a bed of down, it is not so bad as the open air, so we'd better make the best of it."

Beaufort grumbled something to himself, but returned no distinct answer, and they remained silent for some minutes.

The storm was now at its height, the flashes of lightning and the peals of thunder were almost incessant, while the wind and the rain kept pace with them.

"How I pity any poor creatures as is exposed to the *clemency* of the weather, and without not no means of shelter, or where to lay their precious heads," at length remarked Sam, in his usual style. "I say, captain, oughtn't we to consider ourselves lucky that we are not placed in a similar melancholy and miserable situation. I wish, however, that I had thought to bring a bottle of rum in my pocket from the inn, and a couple of short pipes, then we might have enjoyed ourselves like gentlemen."

"Will nothing stop that confounded sarcastic tongue of your's?" said Beaufort.

"Hush—listen."

"What's the matter now? What strange fancy have you got into your stupid head?"

"I thought I heard a sound."

"A sound—why it is all sound, what with the wind and the thunder, and the pattering of the rain, it is nothing else but sounds."

"Ah, but I thought I heard something else," remarked Sam, "it was a groan, or else I never heard a groan in my blessed life."

"Psha," exclaimed Beaufort, "you are a perfect idiot, Sam, or else you are trying all you can to vex and tease me. I've no patience with you. Do you imagine that this wretched old place is haunted?"

"No, but I begin to think we are not alone."

"Nonsense."

"You may call it nonsense if you please," returned Sam, "but I'm almost sure I heard a—there again; did you not hear that?"

Between the pauses of the tempest a deep groan was heard, not far from the spot where they were, and it smote the ears of Beaufort distinctly, who started from his seat with a look of astonishment.

"What can that mean?"

"Vhy, it means what I said it was—a groan," said Sam.

"It certainly sounded like one," said Beaufort, "and it seemed to proceed from yonder corner. Let us examine into this."

"Ay," returned Sam, "we can't both have been deceived, so come along."

The groan was repeated even more audibly than before, and convinced them that they were right in their conjectures as to the part from whence it came.

"Who's there? what are you?" demanded

Beaufort, groping his way through the darkness which pervaded that wretched place, towards the spot whence the sounds had proceeded, together with his companion, Mr. Sam Filcher.

A faint shriek of terror, apparently mingled with astonishment, was the answer to those questions, and then all was again still.

"There was no mistake about that," remarked Sam, "that was a blessed female woman's voice, I'll swear."

"True, but it's so confounded dark that we shall break our legs, if we're not careful in scrambling over this rubbish."

"Ah, see, there she is in that corner, all of a heap, like a bundle of old rags."

A glare of lightning, which for an instant illumined the place, revealed to them the wretched form of what seemed to be a woman, lying crouched up and motionless among the rubbish.

Beaufort instantly approached her, and stooping down examined the unfortunate being as well as he could in the darkness.

"It is a woman, sure enough," he said, "poor wretch, it strikes me that it's all over with her."

"Why, she's not dead, is she?"

"No, not exactly, but I fancy she soon will be."

"Let's take her to the opening yonder," said Sam, "and then we can see her features better."

The wretched woman was quite insensible, but Beaufort and Filcher carried her to the light, where they examined her with much curiosity.

Nothing could possibly be more miserable than the appearance of this unfortunate creature, want, and long suffering had almost accomplished their work, and it was evident that she could not long survive.

"I should say as how she has not been a bad looking woman in her time," observed Sam, "but she looks very bad now. Ah, vot a thing it is to be born to bad luck. She's been von o' those unfortunates, I suppose."

An exclamation of astonishment and emotion from Beaufort interrupted him, and he observed that he was gazing at the unfortunate woman's ghastly features with looks of surprise, compassion, and incredulity.

"Why, vot's the matter now, guvner?"

"Can I believe my eyes?" cried Beaufort, with increased emotion, as he held the inanimate form of the insensible woman in his arms, and still gazed anxiously in her pale face; "this then is the wreck of what once was all that is beautiful."

"Why, captain," said his companion, "blest if you arn't getting quite sentimental. What do you mean? Do you know this here woman?"

"Alas," replied Beaufort, with a look of

remorse that was a perfect stranger to him, "too well—too well. Poor Grace, terrible indeed is the penalty you have had to pay for your numerous vices, and into many of which I led you."

"Come, come, I say, guvner," said Filcher, "you're getting too serious."

"Cease, fool," commanded Beaufort, passionately and impatiently, "I'm in no humour for your foolery. I am taken by surprise, and even villain as I am, I cannot be quite insensible to every feeling of remorse, when I behold in this deplorable condition one who once moved in the highest circles of fashion, and in whose favours I was happy and proud to bask."

"Wheugh," exclaimed Sam, with a whistle and slapping his thigh, "I begins to smell a rat now. Why, you don't mean to say as how this here's your former flame as I've heard you so often talk about; the Vidder Wildlove, I think you called her, eh?"

"Yes, yes," answered Beaufort, hastily "'tis her, unfortunate woman, that we should ever meet again under such wretched, such melancholy circumstances."

"Vell," remarked Sam, "she will never know anything about it, I reckon; for if she's not quite dead now, I fancy she wery soon will be."

"Will you hold that stupid tongue of yours?"

"Oh, vell, I'm done. You needn't be so snappish though."

"Bah?"

"There, that's enough; don't put yourself in a passion."

Beaufort returned no answer to these observations, but continued to support the emaciated form of the dying woman in his arms, and to gaze upon her pale features with feelings of pity and remorse, which it might have been supposed had very long since been banished entirely from his guilty breast.

It was indeed the once gay, fashionable, and beautiful Widow Wildlove, and fearful was the change which time and circumstances had wrought in her appearance. Terrible was the punishment she had received for the abandoned cause she had so unfortunately pursued. Deserted by her former paramours, her friends, as they falsely called themselves, she was driven on the streets, and by degrees sunk to the very lowest depths of shame and degradation. The result is seen, for days and nights she had wandered about the country, destitute of even a morsel of food but such as she received from the hands of charity, until she arrived by chance at this old building, and completely exhausted, and unable to proceed further, she had crawled into it, and laid herself down to die. For it was evident

that her fate was decided, and that a few minutes only would close her earthly career.

For a few minutes she remained in the same unconscious and inanimate state, and it was only by the slightest possible palpitation of the heart that Beaufort knew that she still lived; while Sam Filcher stood by and looked on with impatient curiosity.

"It's a settled case," he said, at last, carelessly, "she has gone too far to recover, and you may as well let her go off quietly. I don't suppose that you want to be known by her, as I should think it would not be very pleasant to you both."

"Will you keep your opinions to yourself?" returned Beaufort, angrily, "and not tender your advice till you are asked for it?"

"All right, I'll say no more."

"Hush! see; she gives signs of reviving."

A long drawn sigh escaped the bosom of the unfortunate woman, and the next minute she opened her eyes, and becoming conscious that she was supported in the arms of some one, she attempted to speak, but could not.

Beaufort could not conquer his agitation, and he even trembled.

"Grace, unfortunate Grace," he exclaimed almost involuntarily.

The words, and the tones of the voice in which they had been spoken, seemed to fall upon the ear of the dying woman with an effect truly electrifying; she grasped at Beaufort's arm convulsively, and turned her eyes upon his countenance with an expression such as it would be very difficult to describe properly, or once having seen it, ever to forget.

Again the lightning illumined the place, and the ghastly looks of the guilty Beaufort and his former paramour met.

A wild shriek escaped the lips of the once beautiful Grace Wildlove, as she recognised her former companion in vice, she did not become insensible, but she grasped his arm with still more convulsive vehemence, and gazed at him with a mingled expression of terror, reproach and disgust, which made him shudder.

The wretched creature made several ineffectual attempts to speak, but at length in a voice, the very tones of which spoke of the rapid approach of death, thrilling to the heart, and making an impression which it would be difficult for anything to eradicate, she said—

"Partner in my guilt; tempter, villain, what accursed chance has caused us thus to meet again? Come you here to mock me in my last moments? Away, begone, and leave the wretched fallen one to die alone."

"Grace," said Beaufort, "this is not the time for invective or reproach, we have both been most guilty. I am sorry to meet you thus, and only wish that I could render you

any consolation and assistance in this terrible emergency."

"Consolation! assistance!" she repeated hollowly, and with her eyes still fixed with horror and disgust upon him; "consolation and assistance from a guilty miscreant like you, to whose base artifices I may attribute half the damning sin upon my conscience, and which makes me tremble at the thought of eternity; cease, monster, your words are torture to my soul. Ah, that dreadful pang!—'tis coming—the last awful moment has arrived—life's busy and chequered scene closes in darkness upon the wild career of the unhappy courtesan; my sight grows dim—all is black and dismal around; would that I could pray; but, no, no, that must not be. All-merciful heaven, is there no hope? Pardon—par—"

The last word remained unfinished on her lips, she raised her eyes imploringly and despairingly towards heaven, one deep sigh issued from her lips, her eyes closed, her head sunk back, and the guilty Beaufort held in his arms a ghastly corpse.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE FURTHER PROCEEDINGS OF BEAUFORT AND FILCHER.

For two or three minutes the conscience-stricken Beaufort continued to support the corpse of the unfortunate Grace Wildlove in his arms, and to gaze upon her ghastly features in a state of stupefaction, whilst Sam Filcher stood by, and seemed to look upon the awful spectacle with the most perfect indifference.

"Well," said the latter at last, "it's all over with her, at any rate. Come, captain, what's the use standing and looking at her in that manner?"

"Unfeeling brute! will nothing make any impression upon your callous stubborn, nature?"

"Vell," said the heartless ruffian, "it's no use a crying about it; it's no more than what we must all come to, one time or other, though I doubt much whether the end of you and I will be quite so easy as hers."

"Cease, I again command you," said Beaufort; "I have listened too long to your nonsense. Yes," he continued, as he gently laid the cold remains upon the ground, "she is indeed no more, she's called to her last account. Hah."

He shuddered and averted his looks.

"The storm is now over," remarked Sam, "and as it is not very pleasant to remain here with a dead body, I advise that we should at once proceed on our journey. The

body of this poor woman will be discovered by some one, I dare say, and it will be buried by the parish, no doubt."

"Poor Grace," said Beaufort, fixing another look of pity on the livid features of the deceased.

"Come, come," said Sam, impatiently, "do not let us linger here any longer, for this place is enough to give any one the horrors. If we walk sharp, we shall soon arrive at a town, where I think we may as well put up for the remainder of the night."

To this Beaufort silently assented, and they quitted the building and proceeded on their way.

The storm, as Sam Filcher had intimated, had now entirely ceased, but the night was still dark and cheerless, and not at all calculated to raise the spirits, of the traveller.

It was a long time since those of Beaufort had been in such a depressed state as they were at present, and conscience was busy at work on his brain. The awful and unexpected event which had just taken place, had made a powerful and solemn impression upon his mind, which it was not easy to remove, and he brooded in gloomy and painful silence over it.

Sam Filcher did not offer to break in upon the dismal meditations of his companion, but alternately whistled and hummed a song to himself, apparently in a very contented and satisfactory state of mind.

"Hold that confounded noise," at length said Beaufort, in surly tones; "what the devil have you got to whistle and sing about, I should like to know?"

"And what have I got to cry about I should like to know?" returned Sam, "I always like to put the most cheerful heart upon everything."

"Psha! you have been full of your foolery all the evening."

"Well you may call it foolery, if you please captain, but for my own part, I consider it more t'other, when a man wishes to make himself happy and agreeable with everybody and everything. Th' fact on it is, gunner, that you are not in one of your best of humours to-night, and I think you might treat an old pal, and one who is ready to serve you, more civilly. Hous'ever, if my company's so disagreeable to you, I think we had better part, and you can go one way and I another. Sam Filcher does not like too much of the monkey, 'specially when he gives no cause for it."

"Psha," replied Beaufort, who saw that Sam was now getting angry with him, and that it would not be prudent to aggravate that feeling; "what's the use of our quarrelling, Filcher? I did not wish to offend you."

"Oh, well, that alters th' business, and 'as

I am not easily offended, why I accept your apology."

"The fact is, Filcher," observed Beaufort, "that this adventure to night has somewhat staggered me. I cannot help feeling some regret at the death of my former paramour. She possessed a generous heart, and I believe at one time that she was sincerely attached to me."

"Poor creetur," said Sam, sympathetically, "it's a pity she could not weather th' storm better. Hous'ever think no more about it, captain, we shall soon have other and more partic'lar business to attend to."

"True, and if success does not crown my designs, it shall be no fault of mine."

"Well, there's not much fear of that, I should think, if as you say, you have got Lord Selborne so completely in your power."

"I've told you the truth, Sam, but as I have before said, it is necessary that we should act with caution."

"To be sure it is," coincided Filcher, "I think you know that you can depend upon me?"

"I do, I never found you deceive me yet."

"And you never will, that is, if you only act the thing that is fair towards me. Deceive, old pals? 'Tis not in his natur', honour, honour, amongst the—gentlemen I mean."

And the reckless and facetious scamp placed his hands upon his heart with mock solemnity and sincerity.

"Enough," said Beaufort, with a laugh; "I am satisfied, but have we much farther to go before we shall arrive at the town you spoke of? I'm getting tired."

"A few minutes more will bring us to it," answered Sam, "and devilish glad I am of it, for for I'm not only tired, but precious hungry and dry."

Having thus spoken, Sam Filcher recommenced whistling and singing heartily.

"All right, here we are at last, he suddenly exclaimed, pointing to some glimmering lights between the trees, at a short distance and which appeared to proceed from the windows of human habitations.

Beaufort expressed his satisfaction, and in another minute or two, breaking in between the trees, they came suddenly upon the town, at the entrance to which there was a comfortable looking inn, which they immediately entered, and soon found themselves seated before a cheerful fire, and supplied with such refreshments as they required.

Having despatched these, and passed a short time in conversation, they retired to rest.

But the awful scene of the death of Grace Wildlove, which he had witnessed in the old building, still continued to haunt the imagination and disturb the guilty mind of Beaufort, and for some time would not suffer him

to sleep. The last words of the wretched woman, too, had made an impression on him that he could not get rid of, and hardened and callous as he usually was his conscience severely smote him. He recalled to his memory the fair and virtuous being that she was when he first became acquainted with her, and when he reflected that it was his insidious artifices that first lured her from the paths of rectitude and honour, and ultimately plunged her so deeply in crime that it was impossible for her to extricate herself, he could not but look upon himself as a villain of the very deepest dye. And what could he expect would ultimately be his fate? What the certain reward of the numerous crimes he had committed, and which called aloud for retribution? He shuddered with an instinctive feeling of horror at the thought, and it was long ere he had felt such fears and qualms of conscience before.

"But away with these cowardly thoughts and feelings," he at length ejaculated, making a strong effort to arouse himself from them; "it is now too late for repentance or remorse, I cannot recal the past, I have proceeded too far in the pathway of crime to retrace my guilty footsteps, and I must therefore learn to brave the future, whatever my fate may be. Selborne must and shall comply with my demands, however repugnant to his feelings it may be, and fortune's smiles will then once more be mine, and I may then again launch forth into those scenes of gaiety and pleasure I once so freely indulged in."

With these thoughts the guilty man endeavoured to drown the voice of conscience, and after a time he sunk off to sleep.

But in spite of all his efforts to banish the torturing ideas that had racked his brain, they pursued him in his dreams, and rendered the hours of sleep those of misery instead of rest.

Again he fancied himself in the old ruinous building, with the fierce tempest raging without. Again he heard the fearful observations of the ill-fated Grace Wildlove, and witnessed her ghastly features, her dying agonies. Once more he listened to her curses, and imagined that they were on the eve of being realised.

The scene suddenly changed, and he imagined himself rioting in noisy revelry and dissipation, whilst heaps of glittering gold were piled around him and within his grasp. How he laughed in all the delirium of his wild and frantic delight, and went to seize the boundless wealth within his reach, but at the moment the most frightful yells rent the air, such as fiends alone could give utterance to, the gold vanished, and hideous mocking faces supplied its place, fierce flames of fire blazed on every side, the earth, the air, his every respiration were hot, in-

tensely, insupportably hot and suffocating, his very brain seemed to be on fire, and his bursting eyelids in their sockets. He felt himself imprisoned in a fiery furnace, and without the means of escape. Oh, the horror, the agony of that moment, it would be impossible to pourtray it. He shrieked aloud, and all recollection left him.

Again he dreamt, and different again was the vision presented to his disordered imagination. He was wandering alone, and at night, across a wild and barren moor over which the howling wind swept in frightful gusts, accompanied by vivid flashes of lightning and the murmuring of distant thunder at intervals. He fancied in his dream, he knew not why he was there, but some invisible and irresistible power seemed to urge him on, although horrors accumulated around him as he proceeded, and a terrible foreboding that the crisis of his fate was approaching, tortured his mind.

Denser, and still more dense became the darkness, his eyes could not penetrate it even at the shortest distance before him, yet he was impelled to advance, although every step he took seemed to lead him nearer to his awful fate.

Suddenly a terrific peal of thunder rent the air, the earth trembled and yawned beneath him, demoniac voices mocked and yelled in his ears, the heavens became one blaze of light, and immediately before him, to his appalled sight was revealed a gibbet, in which were the ghastly remains of some wretched criminal, in a most horrible and disgusting state of decomposition. He looked again, the livid features of the corpse were perfect, though clothed in all the horrors of violent death.

His limbs were convulsed with agony, and his blood seemed to run icy cold throughout, for in the features of the corpse he recognised those of himself, and at the same time a hundred unearthly voices yelled in his ears:

"Guilty wretch, behold your certain doom."

The terrors of this dream were too great, and with a cry of agony, and the perspiration starting through every pore, the guilty Beaufort awoke, and sprang from the bed, sinking on his knees, with clasped hands, he glared around him in a state of the most abject fear, and for a few minutes scarcely conscious as to where he was, or, whether what he had seen in his dream was the effect of his disordered imagination, or reality.

But was it a delusion, or did his distracted fancy deceive him? At that moment, a low dismal moaning sound smote his ears, and turning round with convulsive haste, he could almost have sworn that he beheld the shadowy form of a female, resembling in every particular that of the deceased Grace

Wildlove, glide noiselessly across the opposite side of the room, and gradually vanish, fading into thin air.

So strong was this fearful impression on his mind, that starting to his feet, and gazing upon vacancy, he trembled more violently than before. But nothing was to be seen, and the silence which reigned around, and throughout the house was truly awful.

Yet so powerful still was the delusion which held possession of his senses, strengthened by the remembrance of his dream, that for some time he could not banish it, and such were his coward fears that he shuddered to be alone, and was half inclined to seek the company of his guilty associate, Sam Filcher, who slept in the next room to him; but the thoughts of the scorn and derision with which that worthy would be almost certain to treat his fears with-held him, and he continued in the same state of excitement.

It was now at least three hours past midnight, and would soon be daylight, to which Beaufort anxiously looked forward, and to some of the persons in the inn being stirring, for the solemn silence which at present reigned served to increase the gloom and misery of his thoughts, and to fill his mind with all sorts of frightful images.

He walked to the window, opened it, and looked out on the town, with the hope of being able to divert his mind from the torturing subjects that now engrossed it, but it was some time ere he could succeed, or in the least calm the agitation of his feelings.

But at length he did contrive somewhat to arouse himself, and ashamed of the fears that had assailed him, he said—

“Psha! what a very fool I am to suffer myself to give way to this worse than childish weakness. It was but imagination, and surely I have not become so superstitious as to let a mere idle dream thus unman me? What have I to fear? And yet there was something so awfully prophetic in the vision that foretold my doom, that even now the remembrance of it shakes my guilty soul with terror. Away with such thoughts, and let me become myself again.”

He continued at the window, and eagerly watched the coming daylight, for to seek again to rest was useless, and he feared to sleep, even if he had been able to do so, lest similar frightful dreams as those which had before disturbed him, should once more haunt his afflicted imagination.

Daylight at length appeared, and a knock at his chamber door soon afterwards somewhat startled him, but on demanding who it was, the voice of Sam Filcher re-assured him, and opening the door, he gave admittance to that amiable individual, who was equipped all ready to resume the jour-

ney which they had on the previous night arranged to do at an early hour.”

“So, captain,” observed Sam, “you are up, and I suppose, after we have had something to eat—for I can hear the people of the inn about—you will be ready for travelling, as we had better make the best of our way in the cool of the morning.”

Beaufort replied in the affirmative.

“All right,” said Sam; “but, eh, guvner, how pale and queer you look this morning. What is the matter with you?”

“Nothing, nothing,” answered Beaufort, evasively, and endeavouring to conceal the agitation which he had still been unable to entirely get rid of.

“I know better,” replied Filcher, “so it’s no use trying to deceive me. Your looks show me that you have not rested quite so comfortably as you might have done. I suppose you have not been able to forget the adventure in the old house last night, and perhaps you’ve had unpleasant dreams.”

“Well, well, what if I should confess that you have guessed right?” said Beaufort.

“Why, then I should say that you are a fool.”

“How?” said Beaufort, indignantly.

“I ax pardon, captain,” said Filcher, “if I have been too plain with you; but the idea of a man of your character being alarmed by a dream. Ha, ha, ha!”

“Do not mock me, Sam, for I am in no humour to bear it.”

“Well, well, I don’t wish to vex you, captain,” said Filcher, with a derisive grin upon his vulgar and repulsive countenance all the while; “but what did you dream?”

“Listen,” replied Beaufort.

He then related to Filcher the particulars of the strange visions that had occurred to him in the night, and admitted that they had somewhat startled him.

“Nonsense, captain, I’m surprised at you. But come, we had better not talk any further upon that here subject, and I advise you to think no more about it. As for that dream about the gibbet, if it should even come true, some time or other, I should not be disappointed, for it is no more than what gentlemen of our profession have a right to expect, though I hope it will be a long time ere it comes to our turn.”

Beaufort muttered an oath at the careless levity of Sam Filcher, but finding it was useless to argue the point with him, he said no more upon the subject, although, in spite of his efforts, he found it impossible to treat it with indifference.

“Well, are you ready? It’s time we *was* on the road,” said Sam.

“Go on, I’m ready. Anything to get away from this neighbourhood, and to try and drown thought,” said Beaufort.



"A tumbler of the landlord's best is the only very best rem-e-dy for that, as I knows of," observed the sagacious Sam Filcher.

"It cannot drown the voice of conscience," returned Beaufort, forgetting the resolution he had just formed to say no more upon the subject to his hardened companion.

"Conscience be damned," cried the latter; "that may alarm fools and old women, but Mister Sam Filcher is very happy to say that it never troubles him. You're a drivelling cur," he added to himself, but not loud enough for Beaufort to hear him.

Ashamed of the weakness he had displayed, Beaufort returned no answer to the last observations that Filcher had made, but arousing himself, and assuming an appearance of composure, he motioned to Sam to lead the way, and followed him down the stairs.

No. 29.

CHAPTER LXIV.

AN ALARM.—LISTENERS HEAR NO GOOD OF THEMSELVES.

The two villains had reached the door of the room in which they expected to find the landlord, and which was standing partially open, and were about to enter, when they heard the host engaged in conversation with some other person or persons, while an observation which at that moment fell from the lips of the former, bearing reference as they imagined to themselves, excited their curiosity, and arrested them in their intention, and Sam, looking at Beaufort significantly, drew him cautiously and silently aside, but into such a position near the door

that they had every opportunity of over-hearing all that passed, and also of making a speedy retreat by a backway, should any danger threaten.

At first they could only catch broken sentences from the low tones in which they were spoken, but still, however, quite sufficiently to confirm their suspicions, and they listened with deeper interest, and more anxious curiosity than before.

"I could almost swear to the rascals," they at length heard the landlord say, "notwithstanding the time which has elapsed since the robbery, and the change in their personal appearance. It is impossible that I can ever forget the features of the villains who robbed and so ill-used me on Hanley Moor."

"Ah!" said the alarmed Beaufort, in an under tone, "'tis the old grasier whom we robbed on his way home from market, and—"

"Hush!" whispered Sam, and grasping Beaufort's wrist; "listen."

"But you may be mistaken, neighbour Rogers," observed one of the landlord's companions; "and it would be awkward to accuse two innocent men, especially after the long time which has elapsed since the robbery."

"But I tell you I'm certain that I'm not mistaken," returned the landlord, positively; "I had every opportunity of observing them narrowly, for though they escaped after the affair with me, they were shortly afterwards apprehended for another robbery, of which they were convicted, and afterwards transported, from which the tallest one—who used to call himself Captain Beaufort, I think, and was said to be a gentleman by birth—contrived to make his escape. The other flash-looking fellow, is a regular London scamp, who has been in prison almost as many times as there are days in the year. It would be a sin and a shame to let two such scoundrels escape, for no doubt they are wanted for other crimes, so before they leave their rooms, I shall make it my business to go to the constable and give notice. It's strange to me if I do not make them yet pay dearly for the manner in which they treated me."

"Still I would advise you to be cautious, friend Rogers," said the guest.

"Nonsense," replied the host, impatiently, "do you think that I'm so rash and so foolish, as to do anything like that I propose, unless I am thoroughly convinced? But satisfy yourself; here is the advertisement printed after the robbery they committed on me, offering a reward for their apprehension, and giving a full description of their persons, read and judge for yourself."

There was a brief pause, during which the

guest seemed to be perusing the advertisement.

"Well, what do you think of the business now?" inquired the landlord.

"Why, certainly I must say that the description is exact," answered his companion; "and I am now perfectly of your opinion."

"To be sure, you cannot be otherwise. So I'll just give instructions to my men servants to fasten them in their chambers so as to prevent their escaping, and then go and give intelligence to the constable. Perhaps you will accompany me?"

"With pleasure," replied the guest, and the landlord then rang the bell, for the purpose, no doubt, of summoning his attendants.

"Quick!" whispered Filcher, grasping the arm of Beaufort, "there is not an instant to be lost, this place is rather too hot for us. Come."

Beaufort was very much alarmed, but said not a word, and suffered Sam Filcher to conduct him out at the back door near which they had been standing, and stealing across a small yard, they hurried in a contrary direction to the town, and avoiding the high road, by proceeding at the top of their speed, they soon found themselves some considerable distance from the house, and out of the reach of present danger, and there they stopped for a short time to take breath and to consult, being in a narrow and shady lane, without any person to observe them.

"Well," observed Beaufort; "this is a pretty piece of business. Our fancied security was all a delusion, for here are we recognized only a day or two after my landing in England. It is a cursed bad omen of the future."

"Well," replied Sam, "it is certainly a rum start, now who would ever have thought of meeting with this old man in such a different character as that he appeared in when we robbed him?"

"Curses light on him," said Beaufort.

"Oh, don't be alarmed, guvner," replied Sam, "it will be our own faults if they grab us yet. We've got the start of 'em at present, at any rate, and we may consider ourselves lucky that we left bed so early, and overheard the conversation between old Rogers and his guest. It will be some time ere our escape will be known to them, and how disappointed they will be, when they come to unlock our chamber doors, and find that the birds they thought to cage have flown. Ha! ha! ha!"

"It may prove no laughing matter yet," said Beaufort; "for no doubt they will lose no time in pursuing us."

"And what if they do? Haven't we got the use of our legs? But they'll not think it worth while to trouble themselves any

further about us, take my word for that. What could old Rogers gain by our apprehension?"

"True, nothing more than revenge, and the satisfaction of seeing us in limbo. We know what punishment awaits a runaway convict should he be detected. I find that my disguise is not so complete as I thought it was."

"It's no use giving way to any fears upon that subject," remarked Filcher, "at the earliest opportunity we will so change our appearance that it will puzzle any one to know us again."

"Hark?" said Beaufort, starting, and exhibiting some alarm.

"What alarms you now?"

"Did you not hear anything?"

"No."

"Then you must be deaf."

"Not I. But what did you fancy you heard?"

"The voices of the men in the field which bounds this lane. There again."

"I heard that, sure enough," said Sam; "and if one of the speakers isn't old Rogers I'm much mistaken. Let's see."

He clambered up the bank as he spoke, and peeped through the hedge. The voices of the speakers were heard by Beaufort, with some anxiety, until they died away in the distance, and Sam Filcher then returned to him.

"Well, Sam, are our suspicions correct?" he demanded.

"Yes," answered Sam, "'tis old Rogers and his friend, with two of the traps, sure enough, on their way to the inn, where they flatter themselves that they've got us quite secure."

"Then the sooner we pursue our flight the better."

"Yes, we'd better make ourselves scarce, though luckily we've so far got the start of 'em that I don't think we've much to fear. We must manage to walk a few miles further when we can put up at an out of the way public house which I know of till night. Then we can travel in the dark with greater safety, and perhaps with some advantage in another respect. You understand me."

"True; I approve of your plan, so let us proceed without delay."

"Come along, guvner," said Sam, "we're all right now, it will take old Rogers and his companions some time to get to the inn, and by the time they have made the discovery of our flight we shall be far beyond the reach of pursuit."

They cast one look behind them to see that there was no one following them, and then made their way as quick as they could along the lane, which was narrow and winding, and at length brought them into a bye

road at the extremity, where, as far as their eyes could penetrate, the coast was quite clear, and they could see nothing to excite their alarm, and they therefore proceeded with renewed confidence, conversing on different topics, and arranging their nefarious plans for the future.

About mid-day, after they had been walking a considerable further distance than Beaufort had expected they would have to do, they found themselves entering upon a wild and dreary heath or moor, which seemed of considerable extent, and no sooner did Beaufort behold it than he was seized with a shuddering sensation of dread which he could not resist; and as his eyes wandered vacantly over that barren waste, that painful and almost unaccountable feeling increased.

"Why have you chosen to come this way?" he demanded of Sam Filcher, in a faltering voice.

"Because I was forced to do so to get to the place we are bound to," replied Sam; "but hallo, guvner, why what's the matter with you now? Blest if you don't look as white as a sheet, and you tremble as if you'd got the ague."

"This is a cheerless place," returned Beaufort, with another shudder.

"To be sure it is not very gay," said Sam, "but what of that? There's booty to be picked up here sometimes. Many a deed of darkness this wild heath might relate, that is if it could only speak. You are not frightened, are you?"

"Frightened?"

"Yes, you look so."

"No, no, I'm not. And yet, can't we avoid crossing it?"

"No; what do you fear?"

"I know not," replied Beaufort, in the same trembling and hesitating voice, "and yet I cannot resist the idea that this place strongly resembles the dreary moor I beheld in my dream."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Filcher, "what an idea. And what if it does? Why, I'm blest, captain, if you arn't become as timid as an old woman. Come along."

Beaufort returned no answer, but the strange thoughts and feelings that had taken possession of him increased in strength, defying all his efforts to conquer them, and it was not without the greatest reluctance that he followed the reckless Sam Filcher, who resumed his old and favourite habit of singing and whistling alternately.

But the further Beaufort proceeded the more powerful and irresistible became the impression on his mind of the remarkable resemblance which the heath bore to the one he had seen in his fearful dream; and as all the strange and appalling circumstances of that dream with the visions that

preceded it, recurred to his recollection, a fearful foreboding arose to his mind, which filled him with the most cowardly feelings of terror.

"Why do you loiter behind?" suddenly interrogated Filcher.

"How far is it across this heath?" eagerly asked Beaufort.

"As near seven miles as possible."

"Seven miles?"

"Aye, summat more or less, so the sooner we quicken our speed the better. We've had nothing to eat since last night, and I feel so precious hungry that I could almost eat my hat."

Beaufort did not consider it worth while to return any answer to this, and they again proceeded with increased speed.

But suddenly Beaufort paused, uttering a faint exclamation of surprise and terror, and grasping the arm of his companion convulsively, pointed to the dark shadow of some object in the distance.

"What's up now?" demanded Filcher; "what are you pointing at?"

"Do you not see?" replied Beaufort, in a tremulous voice, and with a look of terror.

"What fancy have you got into your head this time?"

"'Tis no fancy, do you not behold that to which I direct your attention? There!"

"Well I see," observed Filcher, carelessly, "and what of that? Is there anything so wonderful in a gibbet? That has stood there for many years to my knowledge. It contains the blackened bones of a murderer. It has had a long airing, and—"

"Silence, fool, on your life!" interrupted Beaufort, with increased agitation. "My dream! my dream!"

"Curse your dream!" returned Filcher, scornfully and impatiently; "will nothing drive that out of your recollection? You're going mad I think. Come along, I'm tired of this."

"Surely we have no occasion to approach nearer that ghastly object?"

"Come along, I say, we must pass it, or else we shall have to go two or three miles out of our way, and perhaps might drop upon those whom it might not be altogether convenient to see. Now then, be a man, and let's have no more trembling and skulking."

Beaufort did indeed tremble, and it was impossible for him to conquer the emotions of terror that agitated his mind.

Filcher was almost compelled to drag him along, at the same time he viewed his fears with the utmost derision and contempt.

Those fears increased the nearer they approached the object of them, and when he heard the harsh and dismal creaking of the gibbet, as it swung in the wind which swept across the heath, and looking up beheld that

they were standing immediately under it, with the mouldering bones of the skeleton clearly presented to their gaze, he could not suppress a cry of horror, and covered his face with his hands.

"Well, I never," said the hardened ruffian, Filcher, with a laugh; "to think that the once bold and daring Captain Beaufort, the highwayman, and murderer, for ought I know, to be frightened at the sight of a gibbet, and a harmless *skilinton*, I couldn't have thought it. Why, do you hide your face? Look up, guvner, and be a man again."

"Let us leave this frightful spot," gasped Beaufort; "my blood chills with horror."

"I'm surprised, I couldn't have believed it of you."

"No more words, but let us begone."

"With all my heart," said Sam, "and I do not care how soon we arrive at the end of our journey, for I'm so hungry."

He took the arm of Beaufort, and hurried him away, and when the latter again looked up, and saw that they had got some distance from the gibbet, he felt his breast relieved of a heavy weight of fear.

"Now, captain," remarked Filcher, as they proceeded, "no more of this qualmish nonsense, if you please. In about another hour, we shall reach the public-house where we intend to stop till night, and if you do not get rid of your present agitated looks, we might be suspected of having been after no good."

"True, Sam," answered his companion, endeavouring to regain his composure; "I agree with what you say, and am ashamed of the weakness I have displayed, but my dream—"

"Psha!" interrupted Sam, "no more of this, I've no patience with you."

"Bear with me, Sam."

"Bear with you! I think I have, quite long enough. I see no reason for the fears you have shown. As for dreams, I seldom dream, and if I do, they never trouble me, I never give them a second thought."

"But mine were prophetic, and—"

"Stuff! drop the subject."

"Well, I will do so," replied Beaufort, "for I see it is useless talking to you upon it."

"To be sure it is," coincided Sam Filcher, "besides, we have something more particular to think about just now. In the first place we may think ourselves lucky that we overheard that conversation this morning, or, no doubt we should have been caught in a very nice trap."

"True."

"And, in the next place," continued Sam, "we ought to be satisfied that we have been able to avoid pursuit, and have got so far

upon our journey in safety. I'll warrant old Rogers and his friends were rather astounded and bewildered when they found we had so cleverly stolen a march upon them, and effected our escape."

To this Beaufort also assented, and by great exertion in a measure regained his wonted composure, which was increased when, on looking back across the dreary moor, he found that the gibbet was no longer to be seen.

He could not but acknowledge to himself that the suggestions of Sam Filcher were correct, namely, that if he exhibited the same agitation that he had lately done, when they arrived at the tavern it might excite suspicion, and lead to unpleasant results, and that showed him more than all the necessity of using the utmost precaution, so that by the time they had proceeded some distance further, he had so far recovered himself that he showed very few signs of his former excitement.

"Ab," ejaculated Sam Filcher, in a tone of satisfaction and approval, "now you are something like yourself again, captain, and it pleases me to see it. I thought you could not long give way to the nonsense you allowed to take possession of your senses. Dreams indeed—stuff."

"Do not again allude to them, Filcher," said Beaufort, "they were fearful enough to be sure, and I own that so soon after the awful event which took place in the old house where we sought shelter, they did make a powerful impression upon me, which I found it difficult to remove, but I wish now to banish the recollection of them from my memory."

"That's right," said Sam, "for we've quite enough to think of in arranging our future plans, which I hope will be crowned with all the success that we can wish them."

"No doubt they will. But we are almost approaching the end of this confounded heath, are we not?"

"We are; and in another quarter of an hour, we shall be safely housed in the old tavern."

"We shall have nothing to fear there, I suppose?" said Beaufort.

"Nothing," replied Sam, "I am well known to the landlord there, and the company who frequent his house. They are some of the right sort, and I'll warrant that we shall be all hail fellows well met."

Beaufort expressed his satisfaction, and after walking for a few minutes longer, having quitted the dreary heath, they arrived at the tavern, where Sam Filcher was hailed as an old friend, and Beaufort, as his companion, met with a most cordial reception.

Having partaken of a hearty meal, of which, after having fasted so long, they both

stood in so much need, they quickly felt themselves quite at home, and Beaufort, in the cheerful society in which he found himself, and with the deep libations of some of the best which the jovial host had in his cellar, and of which himself and that most amusing scamp, Mr. Sam Filcher, so liberally indulged in, soon banished all those dismal ideas which had before disturbed him from his mind, and became, as his companion described it, himself again.

In fact, so well pleased were they with the jovial company in which they found themselves, and so freely did they enter into the spirit of all the good things that were placed before them, that towards evening they felt themselves neither in a fit state, nor in the humour to leave the house, and they therefore came to the resolution to alter their arrangements, and to remain at the inn for the night, and pursue their journey by the coach in the morning.

Having come to this determination, Beaufort and Filcher sat down to enjoy themselves for the remainder of the evening, which they did to their hearts' content, and did not separate from their companions and retire to rest until a late hour.

No troublesome dreams disturbed the rest of Beaufort that night, and in the morning he and Filcher took the coach, resolved, being anxious to arrive in London as soon as possible, in that manner to pursue the remainder of their journey, considering also that it was not fraught with so much danger as travelling on foot.

Nothing particular occurred to them on the rest of their journey, and in due time the two villains arrived in London, ripe and ready to put their nefarious designs into execution as soon as possible.

They had a considerable sum of money between them, and the first thing, therefore, that Beaufort did was to purchase a suitable disguise, and he quickly appeared in a fashionable suit, and by the aid of a wig, a moustache, and dying the colour of his whiskers, he was so completely metamorphosed that he entertained not the least fear of being recognised.

Himself and Sam Filcher also took separate lodgings, under assumed names, and as they considered it would be prudent to conceal that they were connected, they never visited each other, but had their place of meeting where they matured their nefarious plans, and made every preparation to commence the infamous plot which they had decided on against Lord Selborne, with every prospect of success.

Day by day one or the other of them watched near the residence of his lordship, but without seeing anything of him, and at length they elicited from one of the domestics,

with whom they had contrived to scrape an acquaintance, that he had been confined to his bed for some weeks with a dangerous illness, and his restoration to convalescence proceeded very slowly.

This information vexed and disappointed Beaufort, and fears beset his mind that the diabolical schemes upon which he had rested all his hopes, might yet be foiled.

"Should this cursed illness terminate fatally," he observed, when himself and Sam Filcher were one day seated alone, in a private room of a low tavern, in the neighbourhood of Westminster, where they were accustomed to meet; "should his lordship die—"

"Why, then," rejoined the facetious Sam, blowing a stiff cloud; "I suppose we may reckon our brilliant prospects at an end, for I don't imagine as how his lordship is so affectionately attached to you, as to put you down in one corner of his will for a thousand or two."

"Bah!" exclaimed Beaufort, passionately, "cannot you be serious for once in a way, when we are discussing a matter of such grave importance? This is no subject to joke upon."

"True, captain," coincided Sam; "it would be a sad disappointment, specially as his lordship, you say, would be likely to bleed freely."

"He would be compelled to do so," replied Beaufort; "or I could so mortify his pride, that he would never again venture to show his face in public society."

"How, guvner?"

"That is my secret."

"Well, and as I'm your bosom friend," said Filcher, "and am I to be your pal in all the mischief, why do you refuse to reveal that secret to me? I don't understand it."

"Be not impatient, Sam," returned Beaufort, "you will know it in time."

"You're not gulling me all this time, are you?" said Filcher, looking at his companion suspiciously.

"Did you ever yet find me deceive you?"

"Well, I can't say as how I ever did," said the ruffian, with a satirical grin; "unless it was at the time when I first became acquainted with you, and I took you to be a gentleman. I think I was deceived then, rather."

"Fool!" exclaimed Beaufort, angrily.

"You flatter me. But I say, captain, don't you think, as you can't see his lordship at present, and we are getting very short of cash, if you were to write a letter to him now—"

"Are you mad?" interrupted Beaufort; "or do you think I am so rash and foolish as thus at once to place myself at his mercy? He would scarcely fail to denounce me, and

then you know what the consequences would be."

"True, then what have you made up your mind to do?"

"Why, there is no alternative but to wait patiently Selborne's recovery, then I will boldly seek an interview with him, and at once commence my designs upon his credulity and his purse."

"Good, but don't you think that will be running a great risk?" interrogated Sam.

"No, I have but to whisper a word in his ear, to frighten him to my purpose," replied Beaufort; "he will not dare refuse to yield compliance with my demands. But come, our companions await us. Let us rejoin them."

To this Sam Filcher readily agreed, and they immediately repaired to the long, dark, smoky room, at the back of the house, in which their associates in crime were seated, drinking and carousing, and joining freely in their drunken revelry, soon became the most jovial and uproarious amongst them.

CHAPTER LXV.

LORD SELBORNE AND THE VILLAIN BEAUFORT.—A SCENE OF EXCITEMENT.—A NARROW ESCAPE.

It is now time that we should return to the conscience stricken Lord Selborne, who after all the perils and adventures he had encountered on the ocean, in a former chapter he landed once more safe in England, a man of sorrow, and bitter, unavailing remorse.

Weeks passed away, and still his lordship experienced no relief from the poignant anguish of his mind, no hope of relief from the heavy weight of care and anxiety that pressed so heavily upon his heart and completely bore him down to the very verge of misery and despair. Fate seemed to mock him, although his repentance was now so sincere, and all his efforts to discover Phoebe—whom he could not help believing still lived—were unavailing, and his heart sickened with anxiety and disappointment.

Amy Ashford too, to whom he had proved a friend, when she was left in so forlorn and distressing a situation, after the impressment of her brother, and who had promised to furnish him with immediate information should she be fortunate enough to obtain any intelligence of our heroine, had been unable to do so, and since her departure from London, he had heard nothing from her—the reason of which the reader will fully understand—and that added to the mystery and uncertainty which continually tortured and bewildered his brain.

He feared again to visit the neighbourhood of Dewsbury—where he was the most likely to obtain the information he required—since his painful meeting with poor old Mark Mayfield, and the recollection of which was ever present to his mind, and added to his poignant anguish and remorse.

Selborne House, in St. James's Square, once so celebrated for the gaiety and hospitality which ever presided beneath its roof, and where all the *elite* of the fashionable world were daily wont to assemble, was now indeed a melancholy place, completely deserted, its walls no more resounded with the strains of mirth, and the voice of gladness, which once might ever there be heard. An aspect of gloom even seemed to pervade the exterior of the building, and strangers passing it would be inclined to imagine that it was uninhabited, and that it had long been abandoned by those who belonged to it, such was the gloom and silence which dwelt upon it.

Lord Selborne kept no society, he had completely abandoned all his former friends and associates, and was seldom seen abroad. He visited no place of public amusement, which he formerly patronised so extensively, but he was still a most liberal contributor to almost every charitable institution in the metropolis, and notwithstanding his former wild and dissipated career was pretty generally known, he was held in universal esteem, and there were many who deeply sympathised with him in the sorrows that pressed upon his heart, and were so fatally preying upon his constitution.

Lord Selborne, in fact, now led the life of a recluse, keeping himself almost entirely secluded in his now gloomy mansion, and brooding in solitude over the heavy sorrows that so deeply afflicted him. A smile was never seen upon his features, his mind seemed to be ever abstracted, and he seldom spoke even to the domestics who were compelled to be in immediate attendance upon him.

Constantly were the thoughts of the unfortunate nobleman fixed upon his innocent victim, and the torturing events of the fatal past, and many were the fervent prayers, that in the sincerity of his compunction, he offered up to heaven for forgiveness, and for the welfare and happiness of poor Phoebe, if indeed insupportable suffering had not long since terminated her earthly sorrows.

He sought in vain for hope and consolation, they came not to his relief, but, on the contrary, daily, hourly, did the anguish of his mind increase, and deeper, and more settled became his despair.

"My own guilty conduct has for ever banished peace from my breast," he would soliloquise; "ever more must I be a stranger to happiness, never again can I venture into

the bright light and sunshine of the world. To me it is now a dreary void, a blank, one wild desert, where only grim shadows of the guilty past alone seem to gather and darken around me. Of what use is now my wealth to me, since it can no longer purchase me pleasure and enjoyment? Of what value are my proud rank and title, since that poor girl whom I so cruelly wronged, is not here to share them with me? They only seem to mock me in my guilt and misery. And do I not observe all the suffering it is now my fate to have to endure? Oh, yes; and more—much, more. In vain may I endeavour to extenuate my guilty conduct, reflection does but serve to paint it to me in blacker colours, the still but terrible voice of conscience will be heard. Oh, vice, how fearful is the retribution which never fails, sooner or later to overtake you."

Such were the agonising thoughts that constantly distracted Lord Selborne's brain, and banished every hope of comfort from his breast.

He frequently reflected upon his extraordinary meeting with the villain Beaufort, and the strange and mysterious words he had uttered to him, and racked his brain in vain to endeavour to fathom their meaning.

"But why should I suffer the observations of such a reckless hypocrite, of a wretch so deeply steeped in every crime, to make the least serious impression on me?" he said; "his motives for the assertions he made use of are too apparent to deceive me. He merely sought to excite my fears for the purposes of extortion, and to prevent my denouncing him to the world. The miscreant, had it not been for him, that insupportable weight of guilt that now presses upon me, would never have been upon my conscience, and I might have been a happy and contented man, deserving of and possessing the respect of my fellow creatures. Oh, how bitterly have I cause to curse him, and to reproach myself for ever having suffered myself to become his dupe, the ready, the willing victim of his vices, his base and insidious artifices. But thank heaven I have nothing more to fear from him. The villain perished, and though frightful indeed was his fate, and the horror of which must ever be present to my memory, it was no more than a just punishment for the atrocious crimes he had committed."

At length the unhappy nobleman became tired of the lonely and monotonous life he led in London, and anxious for a change of scene, he determined to pay another visit to the continent, with the vain hope of gaining some alleviation of his sorrows.

But there, although he wandered about, never tarrying long in one place, his life was one of gloom and misery, as it had

been in London; nothing he gazed upon could afford him the least pleasure, and he refrained from mingling in society with a feeling of repugnance he could not conquer.

After a few weeks passed in this manner, finding that he could not hope thus to obtain any relief to his sorrows, Lord Selborne once more turned his steps towards London, his health more impaired than ever. It seemed as if he was fast sinking into the last stage of consumption; and his physicians did not attempt to deceive him, or to flatter him with false hopes, seeing that he had fully made up his mind to it, and was perfectly resigned to his fate.

On arriving at his mansion in town, his lordship's illness assumed so serious a character that it created the greatest alarm in the minds of those few private friends who were permitted to visit him.

He was confined to his bed, and for some time his strength was completely prostrated, and although he bore them with the utmost patience and resignation, it was evident that his sufferings were very great.

At times he was quite delirious, and then his wild ravings of Phoebe Mayfield were quite piteous to listen to, and sufficiently laid bare the melancholy and deplorable facts that had brought the unfortunate nobleman to his present lamentable condition, and excited the warmest sympathy and deepest feelings of regret in the bosoms of all who heard him.

It was about this time, as has been shown, that the two villains, Beaufort and Filcher, arrived in London, and the reader need not be told with what anxiety and impatience they watched the daily bulletins published in the newspapers, fearing as they did that their diabolical designs would be frustrated, especially as every tresh paragraph gave less hopes of his ultimate recovery.

"Tis cursed unfortunate," observed Beaufort to Sam—who was composedly smoking his pipe, in the little private room of the low tavern before mentioned—after reading one of these alarming bulletins, "after concocting one of the prettiest schemes to make money that was ever devised, to run the chance of being disappointed, when success seemed all but certain. Fate appears to be against us, Selborne's case is a hopeless one, and with his death all my prospects will be at an end. Curses light on this misfortune, I say again."

"And so say I, guvner," replied Sam, in his usual careless manner; "how's ever, it can't be helped, so we may as well take it coolly; worse luck now better another time. His lordship though might have put off his illness and perhaps his death till after you had paid him two or three friendly visits."

"I will not yet abandon myself to despair,

however," said Beaufort, "his lordship may yet recover, notwithstanding his present dangerous situation, and then I will lose no time in putting my designs into execution."

Contrary to all expectations, however, at length Lord Selborne's illness underwent a favourable change, and so rapid was his recovery, that it excited the utmost and pleasurable surprise of his physicians and all who knew him.

His spirits seemed also to be greatly revived, and having resolved, by the advice of his physicians, to seek the benefit of the country air, they expressed the most sanguine hopes of his being speedily restored to complete convalescence.

A day or two before his intended departure, Lord Selborne was sitting alone, when one of his servants made his appearance, and informed him that a gentleman who was waiting below desired to see him.

"Have you his card, Richard?" inquired Lord Selborne.

"No, my lord," replied Richard, "the gentleman said that there was no necessity for that, but that he was a particular friend of your lordship, and wished to see you on business of importance."

"Show the gentleman up stairs Richard," said Selborne, and the servant bowing hastened from the room to obey.

"A gentleman, and come on business of importance, who can this be?" muttered his lordship.

He was not long kept in suspense, for the door was opened, and the visitor, who had a most gentlemanly and fashionable appearance, was ushered into the room, and bowed with formal respect to the nobleman.

Lord Selborne could not help thinking that the figure of the visitor was familiar to him, but he did not remember to have seen his features before, and notwithstanding his courteous demeanour, he could not help feeling a sensation of uneasiness in his presence for which he was at a loss to account.

"Whom have I the honour of addressing?" he inquired politely.

"Lord Selborne," replied the supposed gentleman, with mock politeness, and again bowing, "it affords me infinite pleasure to behold you restored to health.

Lord Selborne recognised the hateful tones of the voice in a moment, and he started as if he had seen a spirit from the grave as he exclaimed—

"Beaufort!"

"Hush!" commanded the villain, as he advanced hastily to his lordship, and grasped his arm with a look of menace. "This visit I need scarcely say is private, and I must not be known."

"What cursed fate preserved you life, when I thought you had perished, and has



brought you hither?" demanded Lord Selborne, in a tremulous voice, and with a look of hatred and disgust.

"You do not then congratulate me on my preservation, or express any pleasure at this unexpected visit," said Beaufort, with a look of the most bitter irony and exultation; "that is unkind of you."

"Villain!"

"Better language, my lord."

"If you value your own safety you will instantly leave me, and never again dare to thrust yourself into my presence."

"Indeed," returned Beaufort, scornfully; "I am sorry to be compelled to decline your advice. I have business of importance with you, as I told your servant, and you will do well if you treat me with becoming civility, and listen to me patiently."

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"Daring miscreant," exclaimed the astonished and indignant nobleman, "think you to intimidate me?"

"No, but you must hear me, and that in a few words. Accident, as you know, prevented me keeping my appointment with you on board the ship, where we met, for which I was very sorry; but better late than never, so now at once to business. There is no one to overhear us, is there?"

Lord Selborne was too much confused and agitated to return any reply, and Beaufort deliberately walked to the door which opened upon an ante-room, which he inspected, then opened the door at which he had entered, and finding that there were no listeners outside, he returned to Lord Selborne with a look of satisfaction, and said—

"It's all right; we have it all to ourselves,

my visit could not have been more opportune, so I may as well make the best use of my time. You seem flurried, my lord; be calm—be calm."

"What would you?"

"In the first place, an advance of money, as my exchequer at present is not in a very flourishing condition," said the daring ruffian, "and then an agreement for more at a stated time, of which we can talk about afterwards."

"Scoundrel!—extortioner!"

"Be it so if you will, but we may as well talk this matter over dispassionately; I am not disposed to quarrel."

"Villain!" exclaimed Lord Selborne, rushing towards the bell-pull; "I will not submit to this."

"Ah, would you betray me?" cried Beaufort, as he darted upon him and arrested him in his purpose."

"I would denounce you," fearlessly replied his lordship, "unless you quietly depart, and promise never more to appear before me again."

"Indeed," said Beaufort, scornfully and maliciously, "but ere you could do so this should prevent you, and silence you for ever."

As he thus spoke, he exhibited a knife which he had had concealed in the sleeve of his coat, and with a look of fierce determination.

"Monster!" cried Lord Selborne, shrinking back with horror, "would you commit murder?"

"Not willingly," coolly replied Beaufort, "because I have more to gain by your continuing to live. However, you know I am a desperate man, and one not likely to submit to be trifled with. I have business to transact with you, which as much concerns yourself as it does me. I have long waited for this opportunity, and now that it has at last occurred to me, I will not fail to avail myself of it. I have a secret for your ear on which your future happiness or misery depends; a secret known to myself alone, and which when you know it, as it affects your character and station in society, you would probably wish to be buried for ever in oblivion."

"And think you that I am to be so easily cajoled?" said Selborne, contemptuously; "I do not believe you."

"You will be compelled to do so upon the proof which I shall give you," returned Beaufort, "Phoebe."

"Ah," exclaimed the agitated nobleman, "dare you pronounce with your polluted lips the name of that innocent, much wronged being? Oh, Phoebe—but what of her?"

"She lives."

"Lives! gracious powers, have you spoken the truth?"

"I have. I repeat that she lives."

"All merciful heaven I thank you, if this man has spoken the truth," exclaimed Lord Selborne, with the most powerful and indescribable emotion; "but where?"

"That is part of the secret which I have to divulge," answered Beaufort, "but ere I do so, I repeat that I must have money."

"Villain!" returned Lord Selborne, resolutely, "I see through the whole of your infamous designs now clearly, and will not suffer myself to be made your dupe. Not a coin shall you extort from me, but I—"

"Obstinate fool!" interrupted the ruffian, fiercely, "you will have reason to repent this; at any rate I will secure these."

As he thus spoke, he hastily snatched up a well-filled purse, and a valuable gold watch that were lying on the table, and thrust them into his pocket.

"Robber!" cried the excited nobleman, rushing desperately upon the villain as he spoke, and seizing him with both hands by the collar of his coat with a strength which was almost incredible in his state of health, and after so many weeks of the most painful suffering, "I will not be thus plundered, and by one whom a word from my lips can consign to the gallows! What ho, there! help, help!"

"Madman," cried the infuriated Beaufort, also grappling with him, but forgetting the knife, which fell from the sleeve of his coat upon the floor; silence, and release your hold, if you would not rush upon your fate."

"Never—never," exclaimed Lord Selborne resolutely, "till I have seen you villain, safely secured, and in a fair way to meet with the reward which your crimes merit. Help—help, I say!"

The villain Beaufort now became terribly alarmed, and with dreadful oaths he pressed his knuckles savagely in Lord Selborne's throat, who being overpowered, and completely exhausted, relaxed his hold, and sunk senseless on the floor.

Beaufort then rushed to the room-door, which he dashed open, and hurried out, but he had scarcely descended the first flight of stairs when he encountered two of the male domestics, who had been alarmed by their master's cries, and were hastening to his assistance.

Beaufort was a powerful man, and knowing the imminent danger of his situation, before the men could recover themselves from their surprise and confusion, he felled them both senseless, and flying down the remainder of the stairs, with the speed of lightning, he rushed out at the hall-door and across the square.

CHAPTER LXV.

BEAUFORT AND SAM FILCHER.—
THE ALARM.

At the corner of one of the streets which led towards the Haymarket, Sam Filcher was anxiously waiting with a hackney coach the return of Beaufort.

Without saying a word to each other, but Beaufort telling the coachman to drive with all the speed he could to Westminster, they both bustled without a moment's delay into the coach which was immediately rolling rapidly on its way to the place of their destination.

Sam Filcher saw by the excited manner of his companion that something desperate had happened, and he allowed him a few minutes to recover himself ere he sought to gratify his own curiosity.

"How now, captain," he inquired, at last, "what success?"

"Success," repeated Beaufort, with an oath, "cursed ill-luck you mean."

"Well, I thought so, from your looks. So his lordship would not be had so easy as you expected, eh?"

"Damn him for a stubborn fool," said Beaufort, passionately.

"So he wouldn't come down? Didn't seem to 'prehiate your advice and kind offers?"

"No."

"And you've come away as you went, I suppose?" said Filcher.

"With the exception of this purse and gold watch, to which I took the liberty of helping myself," replied Beaufort, exhibiting them to Sam, who gloated over them with looks of evident satisfaction.

"The purse is well filled," he observed, "and the ticker is a valuable one, I dare say. These are better than nothing. Come you've not done so much amiss; after all, captain."

"My expectations have been disappointed, and I am enraged," returned the latter.

"Well, it can't be helped," observed Sam, "so it's no use grumbling. You may succeed better another time, for I suppose you don't mean to give it up for a bad job?"

"No; in spite of everything I will yet carry out my designs."

"Well, but come, tell us all about it," said Sam.

Beaufort complied, and briefly related the particulars of what had taken place between himself and Lord Selborne, to which Sam Filcher listened with much interest and curiosity.

"It was an awkward piece of business," he observed, when Beaufort had concluded; "and you may think yourself lucky that

you've escaped. I didn't think his lordship had so much pluck in him. But I say, captain, won't this here business cause a great stir?"

"No doubt of it," answered Beaufort, "and that's where the misfortune is. Selborne will probably publish the affair to the world; it will become known to the authorities that I am in London, and the officers will be on the hunt for me like so many bloodhounds."

"Yes," replied Sam, "but we must contrive to put them on the wrong scent. As for us, we must keep ourselves quiet for a week or two, till the excitement of the affair is blown over, then we can see what's to be done in the business."

To this Beaufort agreed, and the two villains continued to converse on the same subject, till the coach stopped at the end of the street in which the low place to which they now resorted was situated, according to Beaufort's instructions, as he did not think it prudent to let the driver know the exact house to which they were going.

The low public house which formed the rendezvous of Beaufort, Sam Filcher, and numerous other scoundrels of the same description, was one of the most notorious in Westminster, and was situated in one of the vilest rookeries adjacent to old Tothill Fields. There daily and nightly congregated some of the greatest villains that had yet escaped the hands of the hangman, to give indulgence to their drunken propensities and riotous mirth; to exult over the success of their depredations; to share the ill-gotten booty, and to concoct fresh schemes of villainy.

It was not safe for any person at all approaching to respectability to pass near this den of infamy, even in the broad daylight, and the most daring highway robberies in the open streets were of constant occurrence. Yet so inefficient were the police regulations in the early part of the present century, that the appearance of two or three Bow Street officers—robin red-breasts, or scarlet runners, as they were familiarly called—were something like angels' visits, few and far between, and crime might be perpetrated at any hour almost with impunity.

Beaufort had thoroughly regained his composure and usual demeanour—so that the suspicions or curiosity of their guilty associates might not be aroused—before he and Sam Filcher entered the house; and they were greeted by the ruffians when they made their appearance with every demonstration of welcome; and darkness, noise, and blackguardism became as usual the order of the day, and in which Beaufort and Sam Filcher—the latter especially—played most prominent parts.

An extensive burglary had been committed by some of these desperate villains the night previously, and having divided the spoil, they were determined to enjoy themselves over their good fortune, and in which all present were expected to share alike.

A more disgusting scene of riot and debauchery than that which ensued had seldom been witnessed even in that abominable den of infamy, and as night approached their drunken mirth increased, and Beaufort and Filcher were in no hurry to take their departure, while the thoughts of the former were for a time diverted from his exciting adventure with Lord Selborne.

While the ruffians were in the midst of their boisterous revelry, and the drink passed as freely round as the coarse jest and revolting oath, the host suddenly entered the room in which they were seated, his looks evincing excitement and alarm.

"How now, my worthy Tapps," demanded Sam Filcher, "what's up? You look flabbergasted like. What's disturbed you?"

"Enough, I take it," answered the landlord, "and I don't suppose that any of ye will be much pleased with the intelligence I've got for you."

"Out with it," cried two or three of the fellows in a breath.

"Well then," said Tapps, as he was called, "the fact of it is, Joe Grimsdell and his pals didn't manage the business last night quite so cleverly as they might have done, the traps have been put fly, and in a few minutes we may expect them down upon us."

"Then the sooner we make ourselves scarce the better," said Sam Filcher, looking at Beaufort significantly.

"Fly, you drivelling cur," said one of the most repulsive and determined-looking of the fellows, "the first man that attempts to do so might stand a chance of having a brace of bullets in his head. Let them come, and we will give them such a warm reception as they little expect."

"Aye," coincided several of them, in a breath, "no flinching; stick together, and the robin red-breasts will find us more than a match for them."

Sam Filcher muttered an oath between his teeth at the epithet which had been applied to him, and Beaufort felt very uneasy, and wished himself far away, for the prospect of a prison had no charms for him.

All was now excitement and preparation for the expected fray, most of the villains seeming to view it as a rich piece of amusement which they should much enjoy, and awaited the arrival of the officers with impatience.

They armed themselves in the best manner they could on so short a notice, and Beaufort and his facetious and redoubtable

friend, the Sprig of Myrtle, were compelled to do the same, although it was with evident reluctance, and they looked anxiously round for the means of escape at the first opportunity which might present itself.

So certain did the ruffians make of victory, that they did not resort to any means to prevent the entrance of the officers, which they might have done, and when they arrived, which a number of them shortly did, well armed, knowing the desperate characters they should have to contend with, they met with not the least obstruction, but entering the house in a body, they proceeded at once to the room in which the villains were assembled, where they were received with a perfect shower of pots and glasses, and the most frightful yells and execrations.

The scene which followed may be imagined but cannot be properly described. The thieves fought desperately, but several of them being wounded by the cutlasses with which the officers were armed, the advantage soon appeared to be on the side of the latter, although they could not expect their antagonists to yield without a stout resistance.

Beaufort was immediately recognised by one of the officers, by whom he had happened to have been apprehended for the robbery which had led to his transportation some years previously, and calling him by name, made an attempt to secure him, but after a determined struggle, Beaufort succeeded in striking him down, and seeing that the ruffians were fast giving way, and that victory must soon be declared in favour of the officers, him and Sam Filcher watched their opportunity, and as they fancied unobserved by any one, stole out at a back door, but without being able to make their escape from the house, though they thought they might be able to conceal themselves in one of the old rooms above until the officers having gone, they might leave the house in safety.

They hurried up the staircase till they reached the top room, but to their disappointment they found the doors fastened, so that their design of concealment that way was frustrated, and they stood for a moment or two hesitating what to do, while the noise of the strife below, continued unabated.

"We shall stand a good chance of being grabbed, after all," said Sam; "I see a visit to the beak, with the black walls of Newgate in the perspective as clear as daylight, so we may as well make up our minds to it, captain."

"Silence," commanded Beaufort, sternly. "I want none of your predictions, and I know that your courage is failing you, notwithstanding you affect to treat this business with indifference."

"Why as for the matter of that, captain,"

replied Sam Filcher, "I must confess that I have no partickler wish to be locked up just yet, but if we can't avoid it, why we must make the best of it, that's all. It's no use being downhearted."

"It's cursed unfortunate that we happened to be here at this time. We have no means to leave the house. What's to be done?"

"Can't say. Hark, they are hard at it still below. And now, blest if I don't think that some of them are coming up stairs, in pursuit of us, no doubt. It's all up with us, captain."

Beaufort gave utterance to an oath, and Sam Filcher suddenly exclaimed—

"All right, captain, I was mistaken, there is no one coming; and see here is a cock-loft, by which we can make our way to the roof, and see all about us. It's strange we did not perceive this before."

"Quick," said Beaufort, and he immediately ascended the ladder to the trap-door, followed by Sam Filcher, and they quickly found themselves on the roof of the old building, and secured the trap as well as they could after them.

The moon was shining brightly on the roofs of the surrounding wretched houses of the low rookery in which the thieves den was situated, and clearly revealed all the neighbouring courts and alleys, nooks and corners of that crowded and densely populated locality.

Beaufort and Sam crouched down, and crawled cautiously towards the front, peeping over the parapet into the street below.

A number of persons were there assembled, drawn together by the proceedings of the officers and the thieves, and many of them seemed willing to render the former every assistance.

Beaufort and his companion, however, was not long kept in suspense, for the observations of the people below, which reached their ears, soon convinced them that the struggle was over, and that the ruffians were defeated, and immediately afterwards they appeared in the street, handcuffed, and guarded by the officers, and amid the mingled shouts and execrations of the mob.

"All right, captain," remarked Sam, with a look of triumph, "we've managed to give 'em the slip very cleverly; the street will be clear presently, and then we can leave the house without fear. We may thank our lucky stars and no mistake."

"True," coincided Beaufort, "but still we must be cautious or we may yet fall into their hands."

The officers hurried away with their prisoners, followed by the mob, and Beaufort and Sam Filcher seeing the coast clear at last, quitted the roof through the trap, and

cautiously descended the stairs, listening as they proceeded, lest any of the officers had still remained behind.

All was silent, however, and having reached the door of the room in which the exciting scene had taken place, they ventured to look in, and there beheld the worthy Mr. Tapps, gloomily surveying the great damage his property had sustained in the strife.

Their entrance aroused him from his dismal reflections, and he looked at them with surprise.

"So, Master Tapps," said Sam, "the officers have had the best of it, and they did not want you it seems."

"Not at present," replied the landlord, "I suppose I don't weigh my weight yet. This is a damned bad job, and an expensive one to me. You may think yourselves lucky that in the confusion you were able to make your escape."

"True; thanks to the trap-door in the roof of the house," said Beaufort.

"Our pals fought bravely," observed Tapps, "and it was not exactly right of you and Sam Filcher to sneak off in the manner you did."

"Well, per'aps it warn't, but then self-preservation's the first law of natur," replied Sam.

"I would advise you both to depart from here without a moment's delay," said Tapps, "for the officers might chance to take it in their heads to pay me a second visit, and should they find you here you know what the consequences would be."

"Certainly," agreed Beaufort; "so good night. Come, Sam."

They first looked cautiously through the window to be sure that there was no one to observe them about, and they then left the house, and hurrying along in the darkness, they jumped into the first hackney coach they met with, and Beaufort, in order the better to ensure concealment and security, ordered that they should be driven to the east end of the town, where they could put up for the night, and arrange their plans for the future.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE DEPARTURE OF LORD SELBORNE.—A SEVERE TRIAL.

"A narrow escape this captain," said Sam Filcher, as the coach proceeded on its way.

"Yes," returned Beaufort, "and we must be very cautious for the future, for now it is known that we are again in London, and that the very officer who formerly apprehended me, should this night have seen and recognised me, every means no doubt will be

adopted for our detection. My disguise is evidently not yet complete, and I must see to it."

"True," said Sam, "but what of your plans against Lord Selborne?"

"Curses light on him," replied Beaufort, passionately, "his obstinacy has retarded the accomplishment of my designs to an indefinite period; but still I will not abandon them, and during his absence from town I shall have time to mature them, and the better ensure their success."

"And every success I wish you, captain," said Filcher, "and if you was only just to explain your designs more clearly to me, I might be the better able to render you my assistance; for you ought to know by this time that I am good in those matters."

"Be satisfied with what I have told you," said Beaufort, "and be prepared to act as I shall direct you, when the proper time arrives."

"In course I shall; but remember, you must not try to play any tricks with me, captain, for Sam Filcher is not the sort of man to bear with them quietly."

"Bah," said Beaufort, impatiently, "what cause have you to doubt me? But enough of this."

The subject was here dropped, and Beaufort relapsed into silence.

It was some time ere Lord Selborne could recover from the excitement, emotion, surprise, and indignation which the daring intrusion, insolent demands, and ruffianly attack of the villain Beaufort had caused; and the blow which he had dealt him, left him for a few moments stunned and unconscious.

The circumstance also created the greatest sensation among the servants of the mansion, and who were thoroughly at a loss fully to understand the meaning of the outrage, Beaufort being unknown to any of his lordship's present domestics.

Having at length revived, he immediately dismissed his attendants, after having given instructions to his valet to report the particulars of the robbery and outrage to the nearest magistrate, determined as he was notwithstanding the ambiguous hints and threats which Beaufort had thrown out, that he should not, if possible, escape detection and punishment.

The circumstances attending the interview so unexpected—and when he had never thought to behold the villain Beaufort again, believing that he had perished in the burning ship—surprised and bewildered him, and the hints he had thrown out regarding Phoebe, whom he asserted to be still living, added to his anxiety and perplexity.

"What meaning do his dark insinuations convey?" he soliloquised; "I would fain reject them altogether, as unworthy of serious

attention, but cannot. What can be the secret which he said he has the power to communicate; a secret which is of such vital importance, and upon which my future happiness or misery depends. I am at a loss to conjecture, and the longer I reflect upon it, the more am I bewildered. But should I place the least confidence in the assertions of one so base, and who is entirely callous to every feeling of truth and honour? It is evident that it was a guilty design to endeavour to enforce my compliance with his bold and extortionate demands, and likewise to prevent my denouncing him to the world in his true character. But it shall not succeed. No, I will never again suffer myself to be made the dupe of such a hardened and shameless miscreant."

He paused for a minute or two and reflected, and again his mind became agitated with mingled feelings of hope, doubt, and fear.

"Dear, unfortunate Phoebe," he said, "I cannot divest myself of the melancholy hope that you still live, and that it may yet be my fate to behold you again, and to listen to the beloved tones of your voice; and yet do I ever shrink from the realisation of that idea with a feeling of dread, for never, never can I expect to meet with her forgiveness for the many wrongs I have done her. Must she not rather view me with emotions of disgust and abhorrence, as the heartless betrayer of her innocence, the destroyer of her happiness? Torturing thought—and yet it is too painfully probable to be dismissed from my mind."

Again he paused, and for some time gave way to the most torturing reflections, to which these ideas naturally gave rise to.

"But in spite of all that may follow," he at length said, "I will endeavour to ascertain the truth or falsehood of Beaufort's assertions, and to discover whether my hapless victim still survives. Again will I venture to visit her native village, and to have my doubts and surmises at once confirmed or removed; and may heaven grant that my wishes shall be realised."

On this course he was immediately determined, and to delay his journey from town no longer than the day after the morrow, by which time he hoped to recover from the state of agitation into which his painful and alarming meeting with Beaufort had thrown him.

The remainder of this eventful day was passed by Lord Selborne in the most torturing state of thought and agitation, and the domestics of the establishment busied themselves in discussing the strange and alarming circumstance, forming various but unsatisfactory conjectures upon it.

The advertisements that appeared in all

the newspapers the following morning, describing the name and person of Beaufort, and offering a reward for his apprehension, however, offered a sufficient explanation, for they then discovered that the daring perpetrator of the robbery and outrage was no other than the villain Captain Beaufort, the so-called former friend and associate of their noble master, and their surprise and curiosity were increased.

At the time he had appointed, Lord Selborne quitted town, attended only by one faithful and confidential servant, and with a mind agitated by various hopes and fears, and bent his way once more towards that part of the country which was connected with him by so many painful circumstances and melancholy remembrances. As he approached towards the end of the journey, the familiarity of the well-known scenes that met his gaze at every turn, recalled in yet more vivid colours the dismal events of the past, and his heart sunk within him, while bitter feelings of regret and the most sincere remorse agitated his breast.

Time and long care and anxiety had wrought so great a change in his lordship's features and personal appearance, that it would have been almost impossible for those even who had formerly been most intimately acquainted with him to recognise him, a circumstance which afforded him more satisfaction than otherwise, as it was his desire to remain incog.

It was on a beautiful autumn day, about a week after the return of Henry Ashford from sea, that his lordship arrived at the end of his journey, and put up at a respectable old-fashioned inn, situated in a retired spot, about a couple of miles from the village of Dewsbury, which, however, he could not make up his mind to venture to visit till after he had rested a day or two to collect himself, and had sent his faithful attendant to make some inquiries.

This task the latter performed in the most successful and satisfactory manner; ascertaining that not only was poor Phoebe still living, but that she had been for some time residing near her native village, and under the protection of Henry Ashford and his gentle sister Amy, and that it was rumoured that to the former she was in a short time about to be united.

Richard also learned all the melancholy particulars of the hopeless situation of poor old Mark Mayfield, and that his restoration to his senses, or a reconciliation with his suffering daughter were apparently as far off as ever.

So far then the villain Beaufort had spoken the truth, and what were now the various and conflicting emotions that agitated Lord Selborne's breast. Again was he near

that unfortunate being for whose cruel sufferings his conscience so bitterly upbraided him. But could he dare venture to approach her, to reveal himself to her, to assure her of his penitence, and to implore her to forgive him? Oh, no; he shrunk from the task with terror, for must she not view him with disgust and detestation, and invoke the curses of heaven on his head? She must, and the torturing thought drove him almost to madness and complete despair.

"But can I again leave this neighbourhood," he said, "without again beholding her, even though the sight blast me, and drive me to the very verge of distraction? I cannot; yet she must not see me; I dare not encounter her looks of scorn, of reproach and hatred. I must shrink appalled at the fearful words with which her tongue must greet me, and the tones of that loved voice which were once as heavenly music to my enraptured senses, would fill me with dismay and abject shame, and freeze my very blood to ice. Oh, what a villain have I been, and how richly do I deserve the suffering which the retributive justice of heaven now inflicts upon me."

He beat his breast in the agony of his feelings, and for some time he remained perfectly inconsolable.

His brain was bewildered, and he knew not what to do. At one time he thought that he would write to Phoebe, with all the force, the pathos, and eloquence that his feelings must dictate, assuring her of his penitence, the bitterness of his remorse, his anxiety to make all the atonement in his power, and imploring her forgiveness; but he shrunk from the task and quickly abandoned the idea, fully convinced of the torturing effect, that such an epistle from one who must now be so hateful to her would have upon the poor girl's mind.

The shades of evening fell upon the earth and found Lord Selborne in the same racking state of mind, and unable any longer to endure the solitude of his apartment, he walked from the inn, accompanied by his servant, hoping by that means, as the evening was fine, and the air refreshing, to gain some little relief from the anguish of his thoughts in the contemplation of the romantic and tranquil scenery in the neighbourhood.

He wandered slowly on, deeply wrapped in silent and gloomy meditation, and only at intervals exchanging an observation with his attendant, and almost unconsciously took the way towards the village.

Every step he proceeded, the more painfully familiar became the scenes around him, rekindling the poignant anguish of his soul, and awakening gloomy retrospections of the past. There was not a spot which he had

not with his beauteous victim, years gone by, trod; at that time when sorrow was unknown to her, innocence and happiness alone were her's; fondly she listened to his treacherous vows, for she then believed him all that was good and honourable; alas, how basely had he deceived her, and destroyed her peace of mind for ever. Mentally he cursed himself for one of the most shameless of hypocrites, the most heartless of villains.

And now he drew nigh the old wierd church, and pretty churchyard, with its humble graves and tombstones, and a feeling of awe, almost amounting to fear, stole over him which he could not resist.

How still, how solemn was all around him in that sacred place, and with what soft and mellow radiance did the moonbeams shine upon its quiet precincts.

And now his unconscious footsteps involuntarily guided him to the grave beneath the old yew tree, where rested the ashes of that aged and affectionate being, whose heart he had broken, the mother of Phoebe.

He started and trembled in every limb, when he found himself standing on a spot he should not have dared to approach, he could almost imagine that he saw the mild but ghastly features of the poor old woman peering solemnly, and reproachfully up at him from her silent resting place, that he heard the hollow tones of her voice, as she invoked the retribution of heaven on his head; and overpowered by his emotion, with a cry of agony, and covering his face with his hands, he rushed wildly and distractedly from the spot, followed by his domestic.

Richard would willingly have persuaded his master, in his present state of mind, to return to the inn, but he did not like to take the liberty of advising him to do so, and he continued to ramble on, in the same agitated and distracted manner until he approached the entrance to the village, and suddenly stood again before that humble but once happy cottage in which poor Phoebe was born.

It was still uninhabited, gloomy and deserted, and threatened soon to fall into complete decay.

And what were now the agony of his lordship's feelings as he gazed upon this once peaceful dwelling, which his guilt had rendered desolate? It would indeed be a fruitless task to endeavour to describe them. His heart was full to bursting, and he groaned aloud in the intensity of his misery, and the bitterness of remorse; but still some invisible and irresistible power seemed to rivet him to the spot, and for a few minutes he was unable to attempt to leave it.

He was aroused from this torturing state of feeling by a strange wild laugh, and start-

ing, and looking up with surprise, he beheld standing in the moonlight, a short distance from him, and with her features fixed maliciously upon him, the repulsive figure of the old gipsy sybil, who had so frequently before crossed his path, and that of Phoebe, and whose strange and mysterious predictions had caused them so much alarm. One long arm was stretched menacingly towards him, and the other was enfolded in her old patched cloak, which had evidently seen many many years of service.

Her attitude was fixed, and by her looks which were clearly revealed to his lordship in the moonbeams, she seemed to exult in his confusion and dismay.

It was a few moments before his lordship could recover himself, and Richard was almost as much astonished and alarmed as his master, but at length the latter, advancing a step or two towards the old woman, in a peremptory voice demanded—

“Foul hag, why do you again cross my path, and what is it you seek?”

Another loud laugh escaped the mysterious woman, and in an instant she disappeared among the clustering trees near which she had stood, and when Lord Selborne and his servant rushed thither, they could discover no signs of her.

His lordship paused and reflected for a minute, and then with a sigh, and a still more bewildered brain, he pursued his wandering.

As he had hitherto done, he followed the same accidental direction which his footsteps led him, totally unmindful of whither he went, until suddenly he came upon a pretty cottage, in the lower window of which was seen the reflection of a light.

And before this clean and homely dwelling, his lordship involuntarily stopped, while as he gazed upon it, a strange feeling agitated his breast for which he was unable to account.

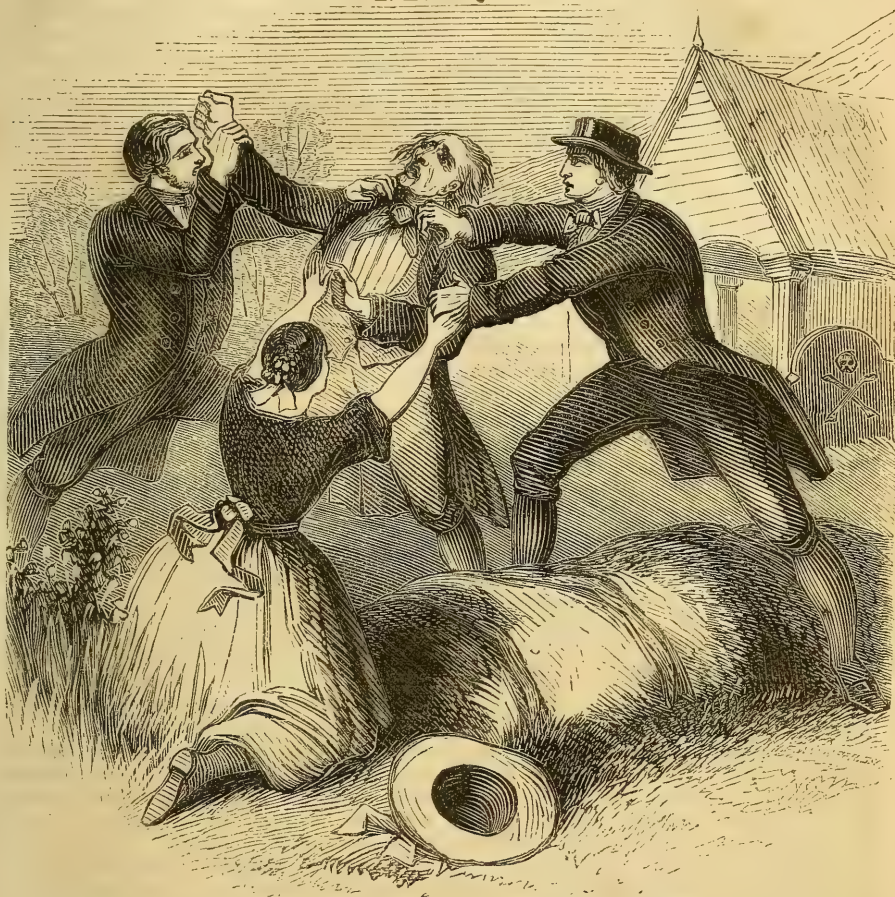
“How is this?” he said, “what is it that agitates me thus? Why do I linger here, as if spell-bound? This cottage should be the abode of peace and happiness, and yet I tremble to look upon it, and my heart sinks within me with a nameless feeling of dread. What, oh, what can this mean?”

“I pray you, my lord,” Richard now ventured to interpose, “to return to the inn; the time is getting late, and the night air is cold.”

“No, no,” replied Selborne, “something seems to enchain me to this spot, and an irresistible curiosity urges me to stay. Know you to whom this cottage belongs?”

Richard hesitated, and seemed loath to answer.

“Why do you pause to reply to my question?” interrogated his master, impatiently.



"Pardon me, my lord," said Richard, "but in the present state of your feelings I would rather be permitted to decline to do so."

"Your reluctance and hesitation to comply with my demands does but increase my curiosity and alarm," said Lord Selborne; "I insist upon an answer to my question."

"Well, my lord," said Richard, "since you insist, I have no alternative but to reply; this then is the residence of Henry Ashford and his sister, and—"

His master interrupted him by an exclamation of surprise and emotion, and was obliged to lean against a tree for support, so great was his agitation.

"Gracious heaven!" he cried, "then are the strange forebodings that haunted my mind realised, and my trembling heart convinces me that at length I am near the un-

fortunate victim of my treachery, and what would be the agony of her feelings did she but know of my presence. And dare I encounter her? Dare I meet those terrible reproaches which she would not fail to heap upon my head? Oh, no, I dare not. But yet I cannot leave this spot without again gazing upon the wreck of that unfortunate and innocent being once so lovely."

He placed his hand upon the little gate opening upon the garden in the front of the cottage as he spoke, but Richard ventured to lay his hand upon his arm, and endeavour to arrest him in his purpose as he observed—

"I pray you again, my lord, to stifle your curiosity for the present, and to leave this spot. At some future period you may be better prepared for the trial to your feelings. Come, my lord, suffer me to persuade you."

"No, no," cried his master, in the same agitated tones; "some instinctive power urges me on, and I cannot resist its influence. Remain here, Richard; I must, if possible, gratify my curiosity and anxiety."

He cautiously opened the gate as he spoke, and with faltering footsteps walked across the pretty little garden towards the cottage, and there again he was compelled to pause, and his heart palpitated violently against his side.

As he stood near the door of the cottage, he fancied he could hear the low murmuring of voices in conversation from within; and the light which glimmered in the parlour convinced him that the inmates had not yet retired to rest, and that they were there seated.

His lordship's agitation increased, and he hesitated what to do; but at last, more strongly convinced than before that he heard persons in conversation, and almost certain that he could distinguish the tones of female voices, he cautiously approached nearer the window, but sufficiently screened from the observation of those within, and listening attentively, he could then plainly distinguish female voices, together with that of a man. Unable to control his curiosity, and impatience any longer, he ventured to peep in at the window upon the persons seated in the parlour, and he could not suppress an exclamation of powerful emotion at the scene which met his gaze.

Once more he beheld that fair being whom he had not for so long a period gazed upon before, seated in the society of Henry Ashford and his sister, and apparently listening with feelings of melancholy satisfaction to their conversation. Pale was the complexion of her countenance, sad, yet calm, the expression of her beautiful features, and Lord Selborne could not but imagine that, in spite of the manifold sufferings, the care and anxiety she had so long endured, she looked more lovely than ever.

And oh, the glances of affection which she bestowed upon the handsome young mariner, and the rapture with which she appeared to listen to his observations, and the passionate regard with which Henry seemed to view her, went to the heart of Lord Selborne, and he could scarcely help giving utterance to an exclamation by which he would probably have betrayed himself.

For the moment his faculties appeared suspended, and every limb was convulsed with the power of his emotion.

He could not remove his eyes from Phoebe—his heart was full to bursting—but still he drew in his breath, and listened with the most profound attention, with the hope of hearing the tones of Phoebe's voice.

There was a pause ensued between the

friends for a few seconds, when our heroine did speak; Lord Selborne heard her, though he could not distinguish the observations she made use of; and oh, how every tone of that now melancholy but mellifluous voice struck upon his heart and thrilled throughout his veins.

He could not restrain a violent burst of feeling, and believing that it must have reached the ears of Phoebe and her companions, fearful of discovery when he was so little prepared for such a painful meeting, with the speed of lightning he retreated from the window, rushed out at the garden gate, and hurried away, followed by Richard who had been anxiously awaiting him.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE SYBIL AGAIN.—LORD SELBORNE'S ANGUISH.—THE LETTER.

With a distracted brain, and scarcely conscious of what he was doing, the unfortunate nobleman hastened from the spot, as though he had just committed some fearful crime, and sought to escape detection.

He had then indeed again seen her; after the lapse of so long a period, passed in uncertainty and suspense, once more had he beheld that fair being whom he had so greatly injured, but to atone for which, and to obtain her forgiveness, he could freely have laid down his life. He had once more listened to the music of her voice; but he could read the feelings of her heart towards Henry Ashford in the looks of affection with which she had regarded him, and his anguish and despair were complete.

He could not, he could never find courage he was convinced to reveal himself; and therefore all chance of his ever hearing her pronounce his forgiveness was now at an end.

He had not proceeded far on his way from the cottage, when he was again startled by a human form crossing his path like some grim phantom, and looking hastily up, he again beheld the old gipsy sybil.

"Mysterious woman," he cried, in an agitated voice—for, in spite of his efforts to subdue it, he could not, especially in the present state of his mind, help encouraging a feeling of superstition—"again do you appear before me, to disgust me by your presence. What is it you now seek? Quick! speak it and begone."

"I see," replied the sybil, in her usual disagreeable voice, "that Lord Selborne cannot despise my prognostications and warnings, even though he would fain affect to do so. 'Tis well. Beware!—you have seen

her; you have once more beheld the innocent victim of your guilty machinations, but never shall you hear her lips pronounce your forgiveness, or the secret on which your future peace and happiness depend till your eyes close for ever in death."

Thus saying, without waiting for any reply, and before his lordship could recover from his surprise and confusion, with a speed which seemed almost impossible from her great age, she hurried from the spot, and was quickly hid from the sight in the distance.

Richard, who was as much astonished as his master, had stood by and gazed upon the singular old woman without being able to interpose.

In a state of mind which it is difficult to describe, after this adventure, Lord Selborne regained the inn, and immediately sought his own chamber, where he gave free vent to the feelings that agitated his breast; but he was so tortured and bewildered that it was some time before he could arrange his thoughts in anything like order.

"Unfortunate Phoebe," he exclaimed, "oh, how could I trust my eyes to gaze upon you? And what a terrible reproach were your pale face and sad expression of features upon the baseness of my conduct towards you. Never can your image, as I have this night seen it, be effaced from my memory. What a fearful history of unmerited suffering do they reveal. And could I ever for a moment, wretch as I am, think of presenting myself before you? Would not the bare sight of me to whom you owe all your misery, disgust and appal you, and bring down your withering curses on my head? It would; and how richly should I deserve it all. I must abandon my first intentions, for I have not how the courage to attempt to put them into execution. Let me away from this neighbourhood, ere accident shall have betrayed me to those whom I have so much cause to dread. I have ascertained that she still lives, I have seen her, and with that I must endeavour to rest satisfied."

Such were the torturing thoughts that beset the mind of the unhappy nobleman as he continued to pace his chamber with disordered steps for some time ere he retired to rest. He had, however, made up his mind, to leave the neighbourhood without delay, and, pursuing his journey, seek in society and change of scene to obtain some relief, although the prospect of his ever being able to succeed in doing so was all but hopeless.

There was another idea which again occurred to him, and with which he tried to console himself, and that was to write at some future time, when he should find himself in a fit state of mind to do so, a letter

to Phoebe, revealing the real nature of his thoughts and feelings, and all that he had so severely yet justly suffered from remorse of conscience, offering her every reparation in his power for the injuries he had inflicted on her, and with sincere wishes for the future happiness of herself and Henry Ashford implore her forgiveness.

"Heaven give me power to do so effectually," he fervently ejaculated, "that I may be able to convince her of the sincerity of my repentance, and move her to relent in the feelings of scorn and abhorrence which my own conscience sufficiently assures me she must now entertain towards me. Oh, what a relief would that be to my mind."

Having come to this determination, Lord Selborne endeavoured to become more calm, and to encourage a faint ray of hope.

His adventure that evening with the mysterious old gipsy sybil, and the strange observations she had made use of to him, notwithstanding he tried to treat them with indifference, as unworthy of any serious consideration, had left a painful and perplexing impression on his mind, and he could not but ponder over them with the most dismal forebodings.

However, as it was now getting late, and as from the stillness which reigned in the inn, he imagined that everybody had retired to rest, his lordship sought his couch.

But busy thought kept him waking for some time, and troublesome dreams haunting his imagination, pursued him in his sleep.

He adhered to the resolution he had formed, namely, to leave the neighbourhood of the village without any further delay, and having completed his arrangements on the day following the events just recorded, the next morning Lord Selborne and his faithful domestic took their departure.

Leaving the unhappy nobleman to proceed on his melancholy wanderings, we will once more seek the society of Phoebe and her friends. Harry and herself were almost constantly in each other's society, and the passion they so sincerely entertained for each other, daily, hourly increased in ardour, and they looked forward to the future, when their fates should be indissolubly united, with the most sanguine hopes and expectations.

Phoebe seldom if ever trusted herself to think of Lord Selborne, and when she did, it is scarcely necessary to say that it was with feelings of the most painful description; and still more torturing must they have been—although every sentiment of regard towards him had long since been extinguished in her breast—had she have known the real state of his lordship's mind, and the sincerity of his compunction. Nay more, what must have been her anguish and

excitement had she been aware that her betrayer had been so near to her on the eventful evening of which we have been writing in the previous pages.

There was but one drawback to the happiness and tranquility of our heroine and her lover, and that was the continued deplorable state of poor old Mark, who remained in much the same state, although he ever received Henry with something like pleasure, and there were times when he even seemed to have some recollection of him, but those symptoms of transient returning reason quickly vanished, and all was darkness again.

Phoebe never ventured to visit him except when sleep rendered him unconscious of the presence of any one, and with what emotions and excruciating anguish and regret would she watch his slumbers, and offer up her prayers to heaven for his recovery.

It may be as well to mention, however, that on the evening when Lord Selborne watched our heroine with such intense anguish through the cottage window, and which was two or three weeks previous to the events we are about to relate, our heroine was more than usually depressed in spirits, and Henry and his sister had exerted themselves to the utmost with but indifferent success to arouse her. Her father had been very ill for the last day or two, and that circumstance served to torture her mind with gloomy forebodings.

It was thus that they were seated on the memorable evening described, when the burst of emotion which Lord Selborne had been unable to control, startled them, and rising hastily from their seats, they gazed towards the window with astonishment and dismay.

Having quickly recovered himself, Henry opened the cottage-door and looked out, but nothing was to be seen, and the cause of the strange noise they were left at a loss to conjecture, though that it proceeded from a human voice they were certain.

"Tis strange," observed Henry, "but we could not all of us have been mistaken; what could it mean?"

"It was the voice of a man," replied Phoebe, "and was that of anguish; I am certain it proceeded from some person standing outside the cottage, and near the window."

"And I thought," remarked Amy, "but still I was probably deceived, I caught the glimpse of a human face for an instant at the casement. This is a most mysterious circumstance."

With that they all agreed, but still were unable to come to any satisfactory conclusion upon the subject.

"Well, probably after all," remarked Henry, "it was nothing more than a simple

joke played upon us by one of our village friends to startle us."

"No," said our heroine, who could not help thinking more seriously of the circumstance than it seemed to admit of, "I do not believe that any of our friends would take such a liberty, especially as they must be aware that I at least have not now the spirits to enjoy such jokes. Besides, as I have before said, the cry seemed to come from some person in great mental agony, and could not have been uttered by the voice of mirth. I am at a loss to fathom the mystery."

"True, dear Phoebe," returned her lover, "and I do not see the use of bothering our brains any further about it. Come, let us drop the subject."

Amy was about to make some reply to this, when they were all again startled by a noise at the window, but very different to that which had before alarmed and surprised them, and immediately looking in that direction, they beheld to their astonishment and disgust the ugly features of the well known gipsy sybil, grinning maliciously upon them.

Again she laughed wildly, as if in exultation and derision, and having fixed one more keen and significant look upon them, she disappeared from the window.

"It is that mysterious old woman, the gipsy sybil," said our heroine, with a look of terror, "whose fearful predictions on several former occasions I have such cause to remember. Her appearance is ever the harbinger of evil."

"The impudent impostor," said Henry, in a tone of vexation, "I will know who and what she is, and the meaning of her constant annoyance."

He hastily quitted the cottage as he thus spoke, and before his sister or Phoebe could attempt to detain him; but in a short time he returned, disappointed, not having been able to see anything of the old woman.

"The old hag deserves to be well punished for those tricks," he observed, "but do not suffer her or her idle predictions to alarm you, Phoebe; she must be mad or very mischievously disposed, or she would not take delight in playing upon the weakness and credulity of people."

This was also the opinion of Amy, and she so expressed herself, at the same time advising our heroine not to suffer herself to give a serious thought to the subject."

Phoebe shook her head.

"I would fain endeavour to do so, Amy," she replied, "but when I remember the strange and fatal manner in which the prognostications she formerly uttered to me were realised, I cannot but feel some uneasiness whenever she appears to me. I would to heaven that I had not again seen her."

"Do not give way to those dismal thoughts and apprehensions, my dear Phoebe, I pray you," said her lover; "your troubles have been severe and unmerited, and I trust that providence will avert any future calamity which may threaten you."

Phoebe tried to compose herself, and to enter into any cheerful conversation on different topics, but she could not, and her and Amy soon afterwards separated from Henry and retired to their chamber for the night, where they continued to discuss the two events of the evening for some time without being able to form any satisfactory or reasonable conjecture upon them.

A month elapsed after these occurrences, without anything further taking place to alarm them, when one day, Henry having been called away from home upon business, Amy and Phoebe were sitting conversing in the little parlour of the cottage, when there was a knock at the door, and on opening it, they saw the old village postman, who presented our heroine with a letter, and then quickly departed.

Phoebe took the letter with a trembling hand, and some surprise, for she knew not who she had to write to her; but as soon as she glanced at the superscription she turned ghastly pale, and a sickly sensation came over her, for the handwriting was painfully familiar to her.

She hesitated for some moments before she ventured to break the seal, but when she did so, and had no sooner scanned the first line, she uttered a faint cry of emotion, and tottering to a chair, almost fainting, and the letter fell from her hand on the floor.

Amy hastened to her astonished and alarmed.

"My dear Phoebe," she anxiously interrogated, "for heaven's sake what agitates you thus? That letter—"

"Is from the author of all my misery, the abandoned Lord Selborne," she with difficulty replied, "my fears and misgivings on the appearance of the gipsy sybil are now accounted for. Oh, why has my heartless betrayer again obtruded himself upon my notice? Is he not satisfied with the ruin he has already wrought, but seeks to work some further evil? I tremble at the thought, and my heart sinks within me."

"Compose yourself, Phoebe," said her companion, "and do not anticipate that which may not be in store for you. Peruse the letter before you come to any hasty conclusion upon the subject."

"Oh, no, I dare not, I cannot," faltered our heroine, "my brain would become bewildered, and I could not see to read the hateful characters. I have—I should have no secrets from you, dear Amy, then read the letter aloud, and I will endeavour to

listen to the contents, although I almost dread to hear them."

Amy complied, and taking up the letter she read it carefully aloud from beginning to end.

The reader will not require to be made acquainted with this epistle, knowing the powerful nature of the feelings under which the unhappy Lord Selborne had written it. Suffice it to say that it was written with all the force, the tenderness, and eloquence which true penitence and remorse could dictate, and made a most powerful appeal to Phoebe for forgiveness, at the same time offering as some reparation for the injuries he had done her, to present her with a handsome fortune on her union with Henry Ashford, if to such a course they had made up their minds.

His lordship also feelingly described the agony of his emotions on the evening that he had watched her through the window of the cottage, and thus was that circumstance fully explained, and all their doubts and surmises on the subject set at rest.

It would indeed be a difficult task properly to describe the various emotions that agitated the breast of our heroine during the reading of this letter. Regret, pity, doubt and fear alternately struggled for ascendancy, and it was several minutes ere she could find words to give expression to her feelings.

"Misguided, guilty Selborne," she at length sighed, while tears trembled in her eyes, "and can remorse at last have touched your heart, and is your penitence sincere? Heaven grant that it may be so, though I cannot banish the doubts and fears that obtrude themselves on my mind. Wretched man, full cause indeed have you for bitter self-reproach."

"Most true, dear Phoebe," said Amy, "and I cannot but believe that his compunction is sincere, and that he most keenly feels the heinousness of his former conduct."

"'Tis fit he should," observed Phoebe, "for oh, how terrible have been the consequences of his guilt. My poor broken-hearted mother brought to a premature grave, my aged father enshrouded in the gloom and horror of insanity, myself—dreadful thoughts, how they torture me. Oh, I may forgive, but never, never can I forget, it is impossible; and may heaven forbid that he should ever more cross my path, for I should shrink appalled in his presence."

"Wretched man," said Amy, "as he must indeed be, if this letter reveals the true state of his feelings. But you will answer it, will you not, Phoebe?"

"No," replied the latter, decidedly, "I dare not trust myself to do so; and in what language could I address him? Oh, God!

what would have been the anguish of my feelings had I been aware that he was so near me, and that his was the voice that gave utterance to that burst of emotion we all heard, and which has so fruitlessly occupied our conjectures ever since."

"True," coincided Amy, "and the feeling the unhappy nobleman then displayed I cannot but think proves the sincerity of his repentance."

"Oh, have I not too fatally experienced the deceit and treachery of mankind to place any confidence in the professions and assertions of one who has been the cause of so much disgrace and suffering to me?" ejaculated our heroine.

"I do not wonder at your doubts and suspicions, Phoebe," returned her companion, "but pray compose yourself, and do not decide too hastily as regards this letter; it requires calm and dispassionate reflection."

"Justice to your brother, Amy," replied Phoebe, "demands that I forbear indignantly to again correspond with one who acted so basely towards him, and I will firmly adhere to my resolution."

Amy saw that it was useless to offer any further argument, and she could not but admit the prudence of her determination, although she could not herself help believing the sincerity of Lord Selborne's penitence, and pitied him.

Harry now returned home, and his surprise and excitement, on being informed of what had taken place, and shown the letter, may be imagined.

"Unfortunate man," he observed, "to what a terrible state of mind has the remembrance of his vices apparently reduced him; "but," he added, fixing an anxious and penetrating look upon our heroine, "can you really forget him, Phoebe? In spite of his former conduct, now that he seems to be so truly penitent and anxious to make atonement, can you not pity him, if indeed a still more tender sentiment is not rekindled in your breast?"

Phoebe looked at him with an expression of surprise and reproach, and tears started to her eyes as she thus replied—

"This from you, Henry? Oh, what have I done to deserve such cruel, such unjust, such ungenerous suspicions? Do you then doubt the sincerity of the sentiments I have acknowledged for you, or think so meanly, so contemptibly of me as to suppose that I can ever in future entertain any other feelings towards Lord Selborne than those of the utmost scorn and repugnance? What have I done that I should thus forfeit your confidence?"

"Oh, pardon my rash tongue that could give utterance to words that have thus wounded your feelings, Phoebe," cried our

hero, fervently and affectionately embracing her, "think not for a moment that I could doubt the fidelity of your love, for could I do so, I should not only be unworthy of it, but one of the most wretched of human beings."

Phoebe returned his embrace with equal fervour, and they quickly recovered themselves after this mutual explanation.

They then discussed the subject of Lord Selborne's letter more calmly and dispassionately, although Phoebe remained firm to the decision she had come to, and resolved to let it remain unanswered.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

Another month wore away in much the same monotonous manner, with the exception that the malady of the unfortunate Mark Mayfield did begin to show some favourable symptoms, which revived the hopes of his daughter and her friends.

The letter of Lord Selborne was left unanswered, and no further was heard from him, so that Phoebe endeavoured to banish him from her memory altogether, and in which she partly succeeded, never venturing to allude to his name, and avoiding all conversation that in any way bore upon him.

Now that the violence of her poor father's madness seemed to have entirely disappeared, Phoebe could no longer restrain her anxiety to have another interview with him, in the fond hope that she might be able to arouse his benighted senses, and once more cause him to recognise her, and acknowledge her for his daughter.

Her friends would have dissuaded her from it, fearing the result, but she persisted, so sanguine were her hopes and expectations, and accompanied by Harry and his sister, therefore, at the time appointed, she went to the house of Mr. Stubbles, where the unfortunate patient was still confined, although no more restraint was put upon him than was absolutely necessary.

On their arrival there, which was in the morning, they were informed that Mark had not yet arisen, but was sleeping calmly and soundly, which he had been doing for several hours, but that as soon as he awoke, and was prepared to see them, he (the keeper) would let them know.

Phoebe, therefore, was compelled to wait with anxious impatience, and many were the hopes and fears that racked her mind during that interval.

At length, however, the time arrived when one of the keepers informed Phoebe that her

father was awake, and that as he appeared unusually calm, and at times inclined to be partially rational, she might safely venture on the interview.

Our heroine, therefore, with a palpitating heart, accompanied by her lover and his sister, made her way to the room in which the poor old man was confined.

On arriving at the door they heard him muttering to himself in an incoherent manner, and laughing alternately. Then he commenced singing a song in soft and plaintive tones, so unusual with him; but suddenly he left off singing, and recommenced talking to himself, and laughing at intervals.

Phoebe was deeply affected, and the more so, when on peeping cautiously in at the door, she beheld him seated on his pallet, playing with infantile simplicity with a toy, and which seemed to afford him infinite amusement and even delight.

Our heroine burst into tears, and drew back in order to recover herself; and Henry and his sister were also deeply affected, and could not help entertaining a feeling of dread at the result of the painful interview which was about to take place.

The afflicted old man thus continued to amuse himself for some minutes, but at length he threw the toy aside, petulantly, and relapsed into silence, and seemed to be wrapped in unconsciousness.

The keeper now beckoned Phoebe to come forward, and her and Amy entered the room with silent steps, and slowly advanced towards the place where Mark was sitting, Henry remaining behind at the door, to watch the interesting and affecting scene which in all probability was about to ensue.

The old man was so deeply wrapped in his own gloom and unconsciousness, that he did not seem to hear them approach, or to be aware that there was anybody in the room but himself, and he never once raised his head.

Unable to wait longer, or to control the emotions that agitated her breast, Phoebe approached him nearer, sunk on her knees before him, and taking his hand, raised it with the most indescribable affection to her lips, while her warm tears fell fast upon it.

Amy stood some little way apart, and waited anxiously for the scene which was about to follow.

The old man started as if awaking from a dream, and after staring vacantly at our heroine for a moment or two, without appearing to have the least idea as to who and what she was, burst into a loud and idiotic laugh, which was more torturing and disheartening to the ears of the poor girl than anything else.

"Father! dear father!" she cried in a voice almost choked by sobs, and then her

tears flowed faster than ever, and she could not finish the fond sentence to which she wished to give utterance.

Fearful was the change that came over the unfortunate old man in a moment. He started at the sound of his wretched daughter's voice, as though that of a fiend had smote his ears; his eyes appeared to flash with supernatural light, a dark cloud passed over his countenance, and his features became so frightfully distorted, that it was appalling to look upon them.

"Feyther!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse and unearthly voice, "seyther," he repeated. "Again that word o' mockery an' shame, do come hissing in the poor old man's ears; an' the very devils will laugh and tell him wi' scorn that he be mad! An, an' the evil one be here again! I see thee now. Off, foul hag—hypocrite—deceiver—abandoned one—off—off!"

He thrust her violently from him as he gave utterance to these wild and terrible expressions, and with a cry of horror she sunk insensible on the floor.

With clenched fists the wretched maniac was then advancing fiercely to strike her, when he was secured by the keepers, and Henry rushing forward with much emotion raised the form of the insensible girl in his arms, and carried her from the room, followed by Amy, who had been a terrified spectatress of the exciting and melancholy scene.

It was some time ere the united efforts of Henry, his sister, and the kind-hearted Mrs. Stubbles—not forgetting the simple but worthy husband of the latter—could succeed in restoring our heroine to sensibility, and when the poor girl did revive to consciousness, and all the horrors of the brief though fearful scene rushed with overwhelming force upon her recollection, she burst into a violent paroxysm of sobs and tears, which, however, served in some measure to relieve her.

"Oh, God!" she cried, "what a terrible trial is this, what have I been compelled to hear? how dreadful is the scene I have witnessed. Wretched Phoebe, there is no hope for you."

"Cease, dear Phoebe, I implore you," said her lover, in soothing accents, "to give way to this excess of anguish, but try to be calm, and to submit to the present will of fate with patience and resignation."

"Oh, how easy is it to advise replied our heroine, with a mournful and impatient look, "but, alas, is not this constant disappointment to my hopes enough to drive me to madness? Unfortunate father, never more, it is too evident, will the light of reason dawn upon your intellect, or will you recognise and acknowledge your unhappy, broken-hearted child."

She wrung her hands in the intensity of her agony, as she uttered these melancholy words, and again wept bitterly and sobbed aloud.

It was in vain that her friends for some time tried in the least to console her; but at length being informed that the violence of her father had subsided, and that he had sunk off into a state of apathy, she became more calm, and after requesting Mr. and Mrs. Stubbles to be unremitting in their attentions to him, with a sad heart, she returned home with Henry and his sister.

Here she gave free vent to her feelings, and Henry and Amy in vain sought to find any argument sufficiently cogent to alleviate the violent anguish of her grief.

"All hope is at an end," she said, "and my heart sickens at the gloomy prospect before me. My poor father's senses are fled for ever, and the sight of me does but serve to excite him to perfect frenzy; never shall I hear him pronounce my forgiveness."

"Nay, dearest Phoebe," said her lover, "sad indeed as is the present, I cannot anticipate the future so gloomily as you do, and you must still struggle against despair."

"Alas," said our heroine, "'tis in vain to excite in my breast false and delusive hopes. They will never be realised; every day the more strongly convinces me of that, and therefore would it not be madness in me to encourage them?"

Amy and her brother saw that it was indeed useless, in Phoebe's present distracted state of mind to try and banish this painful impression, so they desisted from all further argument on the subject, and contented themselves by endeavouring to divert her thoughts, by entering upon other less painful topics.

Phoebe, however, was too deeply afflicted by the severe test which her feelings had undergone, to converse upon any other subject, and the remainder of the day passed away in the most gloomy manner possible, and at an early hour she excused herself, and retired to her chamber alone, glad to be left to the unrestrained indulgence of her own thoughts.

And dismal and torturing indeed were they, for look whichever way she might, nothing could possibly be more cheerless and hopeless than the prospect which appeared before her.

All hopes of her father's recovery, or that she would ever become known to him, be received by him with his former affection, and hear his tongue pronounce the blessed word "pardon," seemed now to be entirely at an end, and that thought was of itself sufficient to distract her brain, and to make her one of the most wretched of human beings.

How bitterly did she weep when she re-

called to her memory his awful looks on her uttering the word *father*, the terrible words which in his madness, he made use of, and the fearful excitement which shook his whole frame, and, as she did so, she pressed her fair hands upon her burning temples, and her heart swelled to bursting.

And in this agonising state of mind she remained till Amy rejoined her, who after once more exerting herself to the utmost to console her to no purpose, but, as it appeared on the contrary, merely to add to the violence of her grief, at length persuaded her to retire to rest, with the hope that, in sleep, she might find that respite from her sorrows of which she stood so much in need.

But alas, even sleep failed to bring tranquillity to the mind of the hapless Phoebe, for her busy and disordered imagination conjured up visions of the most torturing description, and rendered it, if possible, even more terrible than her waking moments.

The following morning she arose unrefreshed, and in fact, so languid, so ill, and so melancholy, that she was unfitted for anything, could not, without pain to herself, enter into conversation, and declined to take her customary morning walk.

But her anxiety to know the state of her unfortunate parent was most intense, as might have been expected, fearing as she did the worst, and at the request of herself and Amy, therefore, Henry, as soon as the morning repast was over, departed to the house of Mr. Stubbles, to make the necessary inquiries.

In due time he returned, and informed our heroine, that her father had been much excited and violent at intervals, but owing to the great attention which had been paid him, and the skill of the physician who had his melancholy case in hand, he was now more calm; and it was hoped that if nothing more occurred to agitate him, no more unfavourable and alarming results would follow.

Two days passed away in this manner, and the old man continued in much the same state. It happened that both Henry and his sister were called away from home, and Phoebe, who had been rambling about all the afternoon, in the evening was sitting at the cottage door, inhaling the refreshing breeze, wafted from the neighbouring hills, and immersed in melancholy meditation.

All the dismal past recurred to her memory, in the most vivid and painful colours, and viewing all the present circumstances as they stood, she could not but anticipate the future in anything but a cheerful or hopeful spirit.

The hour was calm and tranquil, and calculated to soothe the troubled breast;



Phoebe looked on all around, reposing so quietly in the bright moonlight, with a placid eye, but her heart was too sad to permit her to view with her wonted enthusiastic admiration the beautiful works of nature, so profusely revealed in the lovely prospect spread before her.

She felt restless, and was most anxious for the return of those so dear to her, at whose delay she felt somewhat surprised, and at length rising from her seat, and hastily throwing on her bonnet, she quitted the cottage, and walked in the direction they must come, in the hope of meeting them.

She had not proceeded far, however, when she was startled by hearing a strange wild laugh, which rang in her ears with torturing familiarity and dismal foreboding, and ere she had time to collect herself, the laugh was

repeated, and a form dashed madly through an inclosure, and rushed past her with the speed of the affrighted deer, shouting and laughing as if in high glee at the accomplishment of some extraordinary feat.

It was her father.

She was paralysed with astonishment and alarm, and before she could recover herself the poor old man had disappeared, making his way in the direction of the old churchyard.

Another moment, and while our heroine, in an agony of mind which we need not attempt to describe, was still hesitating what to do, the two men who had been appointed keepers to the unfortunate maniac, appeared in sight in rapid pursuit of him.

Phoebe followed them, without making use of a single observation, for the anguish

of her feelings would not allow her to do so. They approached near the old churchyard, and as they did so, the wild laughter of the wretched old man again saluted their ears, and sufficiently indicated to them where he was.

It would be impossible to describe properly the agony of Phoebe's feelings at that moment, and anxious even as she was, she could not without much difficulty proceed to the well known spot.

There, standing erect on the grave of his wife, with gestures, but immovable as a statue, was the poor old man. Oh, how sad, how touching was the sight, enough to move even the sternest, the most insensible heart to pity and regret.

But no sooner did Mark behold them approaching than his attitude became changed to one of defence and defiance, clenching his fists, and laughing in all the terrible frenzy of his fatal malady.

The keepers rushed towards him, and endeavoured to secure him, but he met them with the strength and resolution which only belongs to maynass, and a desperate struggle ensued, Phoebe, in a state of distraction kneeling at her father's feet, clinging to his knees, and hopelessly seeking to awaken him to reason.

He, however, with a wild shout, spurned her from him, and still continued to struggle violently and successfully with his keepers.

"Father—dear, unfortunate father," cried the distracted Phoebe, still kneeling before him with clasped hands, streaming eyes, and looks of the most indescribable agony, "oh, that the blessed light of reason, if only for an interval, might dawn upon your benighted senses, so that you might recognise your wretched child, and know how sincere is her penitence, how bitter her remorse, how terrible have been her sufferings. Oh, spurn me not from you, in mercy do not. No, he heeds me not; madness, all the wild frenzy of madness continues to inflame his brain, and despair alone is mine. Oh, father—father."

"Take her from me," cried the wretched old man, in a voice which thrilled through every heart, and whilst he still struggled violently to release himself from the hold of his keepers; "drag hence the bold faced wanton from the old man's sight, lest he do call down the thunder and the lightning of heaven on her guilty head, and blast her! Away with her, I say—do you think that I be mad, that you do not obey me? I tell ye she be no child o' mine, but a heartless wretch who broke her poor old mither's heart, and who dares to profane that mither's grave by her presence, an' to utter her falsehoods o'er it. Oh, wretch—wretch! See, she mocks me, she do laugh at me; I tell ye

again she be no child o' mine—my sweet bairn was pure, was good, was innocent, and would have laid down her life sooner than have caused one parg to her aged parents, who loved her so fondly. Ah, she be still there, with her bold looks and mocking smiles. Off, I say, and let me strike the abandoned one dead at my feet."

"Oh, God, have mercy!" shrieked the distracted Phoebe, in tones of the greatest horror, and she immediately sunk into insensibility.

Poor old Mark Mayfield, who was now firmly secured by the keepers, stared at his unfortunate daughter for a moment vacantly then, after bursting into a wild laugh, which sounded awfully in that old church-yard, and immediately over the humble but hallowed grave where reposed the ashes of his poor old dame, he exclaimed—

"It be done—the old man ha' triumphed o'er the evil one who comed here to shame and mock at him. His words ha' gone like those of fire to her heart, an' there she do lie, dead. Ha, ha, ha! this be reet, vera reet. Ha, ha, ha!"

It was indeed a most awful sight, to behold that poor white-haired, senseless old man, in the frightful delirium of his madness, laughing and exulting over the supposed corpse of that beautiful and unfortunate daughter whom he had so fondly loved, and the persons present stood by aghast and appalled.

The insensible Phoebe was raised in the arms of one of the female villagers who had been attracted to the spot, and a solemn pause of some minutes ensued, all being too much shocked and confused to be able to come to any conclusion what to do.

It was at this moment that Henry Ashford and his sister arrived at the spot, and their emotions at the affecting scene which presented itself to their sight may be easily imagined.

Henry in a state of the most poignant anguish, snatched Phoebe to his bosom, while the gentle Amy hung over her with the deepest solicitude, and endeavoured to recal her to animation in vain, by the most soothing words.

"My poor lass," said Henry, mournfully, as he gazed in her pale face, and pressed her still closer to his bosom, "how terrible are the trials to which she is subjected. Her heart will break, will certainly break, for it is impossible for her delicate nature to bear up against it."

He kissed her pale cheeks as he thus spoke, and the persons standing by evinced the deepest commiseration; indeed it was a scene that must have moved even the most stern and insensible heart to pity.

"And you, unfortunate old man," Henry

The idea of this undertaking had suggested itself to Henry, and we need not say was prompted by the best of motives, when we explain the nature of it.

Simply then, Henry Ashford was engaged in restoring the long deserted and once happy home of Phoebe and her parents to its former state, in even the most minute particular, with the sanguine hope that the sight of it, so restored, might tend more to arouse the dormant senses of poor old Mark, than anything which had yet been attempted.

With what mingled feelings of emotion Phoebe watched him as he proceeded with this goodly task, and assisted in the work herself, together with Amy, in arranging everything in the different humble rooms, and in the garden as they used to be, we need not describe, and soon the happy task was accomplished, and the old cottage stood again in all its simple rustic beauty.

Every article of furniture had been removed from the old stone house, and restored to their former places, the old pictures once decorated the humble walls, again the venerable clock ticked incessantly, as it had been wont to do, in its former corner of the little parlour, the two old arm chairs resumed their former places in either chimney corner, and the garden in front and behind the cottage bloomed in all their pristine sweetness.

To complete as near as possible, the restoration in every respect and in all its details, a cat and a dog were procured, as closely resembling poor tabby Tom and Frisk as possible, and took up the old position in the two arm chairs as naturally as if they had been accustomed to them all their lives.

And now came the important day of experiment on which almost Phoebe's every hope of happiness was fixed, and all was anxiety, fear, and expectation.

Mark Mayfield, for the last few days had been remarkably calm, and at times even almost rational, and therefore the more sanguine were the hopes of all as to the success of the design, which was to conduct him to the cottage, with the hope that when he beheld it, the effect would be instantaneous, and all that their most anxious wishes could anticipate.

It was so arranged that Phoebe and her friends should place themselves in a position to observe all that passed, without being observed, until they could see the effect which was produced on the poor old man's darkened mind, for they well knew what the consequences of excitement would be.

The long anxiously looked for moment arrived, and Phoebe, with a throbbing heart, and Henry and his sister, took to their place of concealment and observation.

CHAPTER LXX.

AN AFFECTING SCENE.—DISAPPOINTMENT.

The weather was all in favour of the project. A more lovely morning could scarcely be imagined. The sun shone brightly in the clear blue sky, yet the air was cool and balmy, and all looked verdant, joyous, fresh, and beautiful.

It was in the little garden in the front of the cottage, from whence they could command an uninterrupted view of the pathway leading across the green fields to the village, that Phoebe and her companion had concealed themselves; and eagerly they watched for the approach of the unfortunate object of their anxiety.

They were not long kept in suspense. Slowly he came towards the cottage, attended by his keepers, and followed by Mr. and Mrs. Stubbles, who felt a very natural curiosity to view the result of the stratagem.

His step was steady, his demeanour in keeping with it, and, as he came nearer, they could see that the expression of his features was perfectly calm, and that there was not that vacant look about his eyes that for some time had usually characterised them.

All this was calculated to encourage and to strengthen their hopes and expectations, and they awaited the result with greater confidence.

Mark had had his eyes partly fixed upon the ground, as if wrapped in thought, till he, and those who accompanied him, came within a few paces of the cottage, when the keepers purposely said something to each other in order to arouse him, and, raising his eyes, they immediately became fixed, rivetted upon that humble dwelling (now looking as it had done in days gone by) which once formed his peaceful and happy home.

The effect was electrical; his arms were stretched forth towards the cottage as though he would encompass it in his hold, and hug to him as something most loved and precious. His cheeks glowed; light flashed from his eyes wonder and delight; yet incredulity agitated his features; his lips quivered; and every limb was violently convulsed.

For a minute or two he stood and continued to gaze in the same earnest, wandering manner. His whole soul seemed to flash from his eyes.

Suddenly he burst forth into a wild but joyous laugh, and rushing into the garden by the little gate, again paused, amidst a parterre of sweet flowers, carefully planted there by the tasteful hand of his daughter, exclaimed:—

“Ha! ha! ha!—joy, joy, it was only a fearful dream which disturbed an’ distracted

the o'd man's imagination; it be here—wi' its pretty garden an' its blooming flowers, an' there be the open door to receive me a'ter my daily toil, an' my poor o'd dame, an' my pretty bairn, a anxiously waiting my return inside I dare say, an' a wondering that I be not comed home afore. An' hark! there be the old clock; an' I can hear Tabby Tom a purring in my o'd arm chair, an' saucy Frisk barking an' a snarlin' at un. Oh, I must ha' been daft to remain from home so long. Dame!—Phoebe!—I be here! I be here!"

And as the last words escaped his lips he rushed frantically into the cottage, closely followed by the keepers and Mr. and Mrs. Stubbles.

How powerful were the emotions that now agitated the breast of Phoebe. Tears gushed to her eyes; her bosom heaved; her limbs trembled; and mingled feelings of doubt, hope, and fear agitated her breast.

Henry and his sister were scarcely less affected; but they were speedily aroused and alarmed by hearing a loud cry of agony from the poor old woman, and hastening from their concealment to the window, they beheld him standing transfixed as a statue, and gazing wildly at the empty arm-chair, in which his poor old dame used to sit.

How fearful was the change which even these few minutes had wrought in the old man's appearance, and the heart of Phoebe was ready to burst with agony as she beheld it, while the anguish of her companions was scarcely less than her own.

"Dame—dame!" he frantically cried. "No, no! she be not here, she be not here to welcome her poor o'd man from toil. What be the meaning o' this? Dame, dame!—oh, where be you? No, she hears me not. She—ah!—I do recollect it all now. I ha' not been dreaming—an' this be all a mockery. She be dead—dead!"

And with a shriek of agony, sufficient to paralyse all who heard it, the poor old man sunk insensible in the arms of his keepers.

"Tis over," convulsively gasped forth Phoebe, quite overpowered by her feelings; "all hope, all, all, is at an end, and I am a wretch, the miserable cause of all this. Heaven—I dare not appeal to you, for the consciousness of my own guilt convicts and condemns me."

"Phoebe, dear Phoebe," said her lover, "try and be firm; this is painful, most melancholy, I admit; but it is only what might have been expected from the excitement consequent upon a renewal of scenes and associations so dear to the heart. Come, let us retire, we may safely leave your father in the care of his kind friends."

He attempted, as well as his sister, to withdraw her from the window, and to re-conduct her home.

"No, no," she ejaculated, "I cannot, I dare not leave the poor old man thus. Even though his words should wither and annihilate me, I must and will make a heartbroken daughter's appeal to him for mercy and forgiveness. Dear, gray-haired, afflicted old man, your child is here. Your poor old dame rests in heaven, even now, I am certain, invoking of the Almighty blessings upon you and that child's head, whom, when in life, she loved so fondly, and directing you to reason and forgiveness; and it will not be in vain. Father, beloved father, your penitent child is here."

Thus saying, in spite of all the attempts of Henry and his sister to prevent her, she rushed into the cottage, and, throwing her arms frantically around the poor old man's neck, smothered his venerable features with her tears and kisses.

The keepers drew back in respect, and left the parent in his fond daughter's arms, while Henry and Amy could only look on with the greatest sympathy and torturing anxiety as to the result.

Poor Mark for a minute or two remained in the same lifeless state, Phoebe hugging him to her bosom, as though he were a portion of herself, and looking into his pale, venerable, and beloved countenance, so mild, so amiable, so loving, even in his madness, with an intensity of expression that no language can possibly describe.

"Father, beloved father," she sobbed forth as well as her emotions would permit her to articulate, "oh, heaven grant that this present insensibility may be but the prelude to returning reason, and that I may again hear the word 'daughter,' uttered by a parent's lips, with all a parent's love, and hear that blessed word to which my hopes so long have clung—that word for which alone I live, and dare not die without—forgiveness. Father, aged father, your child, your once loved Phoebe, whom as a little one you dandled on your knee, and laughed or wept with parental delight as you listened to her innocent prattle, or led her to gambol amidst the flowers and all things beautiful, while you yourself nobly, from nature's instinct, remembering that, although now a man, was once a little, playful, giddy, thoughtless thing, like her whose tiny hand you held—joined her in her childish sport, laughed with her in her merriest innocent laugh, and emulated her in all her infantile simplicity to show the doating, fond parental love you bore her, that once happy child, now matured to woman, and with all a woman's cares and sorrows, but fervency of love, now holds you to her throbbing, bursting heart, clings to you like the ivy to the tree, calls upon you with all a daughter's veneration, acknowledges her errors, implores your for-

added, after a pause, in a voice of compassion and regret, "alas, will the light of reason never more break upon your dormant senses, to suffer you to learn how little your unhappy daughter is deserving of the estrangement of your love—how much she deserves your pity—your blessings, and not your curses."

Mark, even in his madness, seemed to have some vague comprehension of the purport of Henry's observations, for he gazed at him earnestly for a moment, then turning his gaze upon the pale face of his daughter, with a look divested of its former fearful and unnatural expression, and in accents closely allied to those of pity, said:—

"Blessings, curses, no, no, curses should ne'er escape an o'd man's lips, 'specially those of a doating feyther. Poor thing, poor thing, how pale she do look. Why be it so? can'st thee tell me? for I be not mad, tho' they do call me so. My bonny bairn ne'er did look as she do now; no, no, the roses always bloomed upon her cheeks, and sunny smiles of love an' innocence e'er did light up her pretty features. But then she wur good an' happy, an' ne'er had cause to shrink, an' tremble, an' to turn pale at look or word from any one. Ha! ha!" he again laughed in all his wild frenzy, "it be all a mockery; you cannot impose on the o'd man, because you do think me mad. No, no, no. Tak' her away, tak' her away, an' hide her where virtue be ne'er seen, but vice alone do revel. Away wi' her, abandoned, wanton, bold faced wretch as she be'st!"

"Oh, how agonising is this," said Henry, "unfortunate old man, little can your poor benighted intellect conceive the wrong you do your unhappy daughter by those cruel words. May heaven help you."

Mark stared at him vacantly for a moment or two, but without seeming in the least to understand what he said, for he made no reply, he uttered not a word, but offering no further resistance to the keepers, at a sign from Henry, he suffered himself to be led by them quietly away from the old churchyard, and reconducted to the house of Mr. Stubbles.

The persons who had assembled, moved with compassion, and out of a feeling of respect, quickly dispersed, and Henry Ashford and his sister supporting the still insensible Phoebe, were left to themselves.

"Poor girl," said Henry, in a voice of deep feeling, and looking with intense regret and melancholy in her pale face, so expressive of grief, "that she should thus receive this terrible addition to her sorrows, this almost total annihilation of her hopes. Alas, I shudder at the bare anticipation of the consequences this dreadful shock is likely to produce upon her delicate constitution."

"It is indeed most sad and deplorable," said Amy, "but come, brother, let us remove her from this place without delay, for she does not seem likely to recover yet, and that must be seen to immediately."

To this Henry silently agreed, and carefully raising the inanimate form of the poor girl in his arms, he bore her from the churchyard, followed by his sister.

They were proceeding on their way to their dwelling, and had got out of sight of the sacred place where the melancholy scene had occurred, when a sigh from Phoebe informed them that she was reviving to sensibility, and they paused, and Henry stooping down, and tenderly resting her form upon one knee, while his sister hung affectionately over her, in the most gentle tone he repeated her name.

His voice immediately seemed to strike upon her senses, for she instantly opened her eyes, and fixing them with a look of the most touching melancholy upon Henry and his sister burst into tears, which they were glad to see, as they hoped that it would afford her some relief.

After a minute or two, and when by thus giving vent to the feelings that overloaded her breast, and distracted her mind, she had become somewhat more calm, she ejaculated—

"Oh, god, how terrible is this continued anguish, this addition to my despair, when I would fain encourage hope. Surely, great as my faults I own have been, they do not deserve so severe a punishment as this. Unfortunate parent, poor afflicted old man. But where is he? What has become of him?"

"He became more calm, dear Phoebe," replied her lover, "and submitted to be conducted by his keepers quietly away. But try to compose yourself after this painful shock, and let us return home."

"Yes, Phoebe," said Amy, affectionately, and in the most soothing accents, "your poor father, with the blessing of heaven, will yet recover, and these dark clouds that now so sadly overshadow your fate, will pass away."

"Alas! alas! I fear not," sighed our heroine, as she suffered Henry and his sister to conduct her slowly on the way to their humble residence; "there is no prospect of their doing so. But heaven's will be done, I must endeavour, arduous as is the task, to submit with patience and fortitude to my fate."

"Well said, dear Phoebe," remarked Henry, "and fear not but kind providence will aid you in your efforts, and yet bring about the realisation of your wishes."

Phoebe looked affectionately, and with a faint and melancholy smile in his face, but

made no reply, and soon afterwards they arrived at the cottage.

There Phoebe once more gave free vent to her feelings in tears, and Henry and his sister did not offer to interrupt her by making use of a single observation.

After a time, at the earnest request of our heroine—who had become more calm and collected—her lover quitted the cottage, and hastened to the house of Mr. Stubbles, to ascertain the present state of the poor old man, and Phoebe and Amy were left alone, and anxiously awaiting his return.

Henry was not long in arriving at the house, where he learnt from Mr. Stubbles that Mark was now again perfectly quiet, and that the medical gentlemen under whose skilful treatment he was placed, apprehended no serious consequences from the recent event, if anything which might tend to excite him, should be carefully avoided.

With this hopeful intelligence, Henry hastened on his return home, and found Phoebe and his sister, as he had expected, anxiously awaiting him.

The result of his inquiries was received by both of them with feelings of the utmost satisfaction, and Phoebe now became more composed, and did endeavour once more to encourage hope.

CHAPTER LXIX.

FORTUNE'S CHANGES.

The reader will now be pleased to suppose once more that six months have elapsed since the occurrence of the events recorded in the two or three preceding chapters, and many and important were the changes which even in that brief period had taken place.

The most happy change, however, (after that which had taken place in the state of the unfortunate Mark Mayfield's health, who now seldom suffered any violent paroxysms of his malady, and of whose final restoration to his senses greater hopes were entertained than ever) was that which had come over the circumstances of Henry Ashford and his amiable sister.

Fortune had smiled beneficently upon them and their prospects were now as cheerful as they could well desire.

A wealthy relation—who like many others never deign to acknowledge their poor connexions during their life time, or to assist them with a single fraction—had been reminded by that troublesome but unerring monitor, conscience, at the point of death, that there were two such beings in the world as Henry and Amy Ashford, moreover, that they were the worthy children of his late

only sister, whom he had cruelly neglected in her greatest time of need, when heart-stricken, by the death of an excellent and beloved husband, she was, with her two helpless little one, reduced to a state of complete penury, and must have perished from absolute want, had it not been for the kind and benevolent assistance of those upon whom she had no claim but that of suffering humanity.

Yes, this sordid, miserly relation, had been compelled by conscience, and the dread of that eternity upon which he was so shortly about to enter, to remember Henry and his sister, and bequeathed them sufficient to place them in a comfortable position for the rest of their days.

And never was money bestowed upon two more worthy beings, or those who could feel more grateful for the gifts.

It need not be said how sincerely our heroine rejoiced at the good future of those to whom she was so affectionately attached and indeed there was not an individual in and near the pretty little village of Dewsbury, who did not feel the same gratification, so universally were they esteemed.

We now behold Henry Ashford and his sister, therefore, comfortably settled in a prosperous farm on the estate of their old friend, Mr. Stubbles, who took as much interest in their welfare as if they had been his own nearest and dearest relations; and who was ready at all times to render them all the assistance in his power.

It was a pleasant sight to behold Henry Ashford and those whom he so fondly loved, in their new abode, and to witness the daily increasing prosperity, which the blessings of providence, together with his own indefatigable industry and perseverance were securing him.

There was but one thing that the young farmer now needed to complete his happiness, and that was his union with his dear Phoebe; but to that, much even as her heart urged her to do so, she could not consent until it might please providence to restore her poor father to his senses, and to remove some painful doubts and misgivings which she had, and could not understand, regarding her former unhappy connection with Lord Selborne.

Henry, however, was content, and happy, for Phoebe was constantly near him, gladdening him with her smiles of pure affection, and assuring him that the happy time would come when his fondest hopes and wishes would be realised.

There was one work upon which Henry was engaged, which occupied Phoebe's utmost anxiety, and on the success of the object of which the completion of her happiness principally depended.

giveness, and is then content to die. Speak to me, in mercy speak to me, and let the words you utter be those of reason, and of pure parental affection."

Closer she hugged the poor old man to her bosom, as she gave utterance to those impressive words, and looked into his face with an intensity of feeling, that can only be fully appreciated by those who possess the same.

There was something so truly pathetic, so touching in this scene, and the words just spoken by the unfortunate Phoebe, that it was quite impossible for any one present to help being moved to tears. But no one attempted to interrupt the ebullition of a grief so sacred.

Again and again poor Phoebe kissed her aged parent's lips, his cheeks, his forehead, passed her taper fingers through his thin, silvery hair, gloated with melancholy rapture, upon every well known, and well-loved feature, and by all those fond caresses and endearments, endeavoured to recall him to life, but for some time in vain.

And there, gravely looking on, as though themselves personally connected with, and deeply interested in all that was passing, in either old arm chair, sat the representatives of the never to be forgotten tabby Tom and dog Frisk.

And still tic, tic, tic, went the time-honoured clock, as of yore, and all things looked, and were the same in that humble dwelling as they were wont to be, save the poor afflicted old man, and the fond daughter, whose fair arms entwined his inanimate form, and pressed it convulsively to her bosom.

These alone were changed, and oh, how sad, how deplorable, how awful the change!

At length Henry, fearing the effect that this effecting scene, so long protracted, might have upon Phoebe, gently interposed, and with a look and words of tender persuasion which it was impossible for her to resist, withdrew her from her father, resigning him to the care of the keepers, and attempted, with the assistance of his amiable sister, to remove her from the cottage.

But the latter part of this effort was ineffectual, Phoebe could not leave her father till she had seen him revive, and learnt the ultimate result of this fond stratagem to restore him to reason, and sinking in a chair, she watched his recovery calmly, but anxiously, nervously.

All this, which has taken us, necessarily so much time to describe, occupied but a few brief minutes, but need we say what minutes, nay hours of anguish they were to those present at the trying scene, especially those more immediately interested.

But at length, the proper restoratives having been applied, poor Mark showed some signs of returning life, and Phoebe hastily

left her chair, and gently, anxiously, but at the same time cautiously approached him, carefully attended by Henry and his sister.

Incoherent mutterings, as if arising from the effects of some painful dream, first escaped the old man's lips, and all stood by in breathless and trembling expectation of what was about to ensue.

Not a moment were they kept in suspense for the old man opened his eyes, glared for an instant vacantly around the room and its contents, without seeming to notice those who were present, then glancing at the old arm chair, once occupied by that wife whom he had so fondly loved, he uttered a wild and frenzied shriek of despair, and bursting from the arms of those who supported him, he stood like a statue before it, and gazed at it aghast.

"Dame, dame!" he cried, in accents so piteous, that hard indeed must have been the heart which would not have melted beneath their pathetic influence, "why be you not there? What ha' the o'd man done that he should not find thee here to welcome him? They telled me that thou wur gone to sleep in o'd churchyard, but I know that be false, for thou could'st nae do so, an' leave me here and our bonny bairn alone. Dame, dame, come to me, Phoebe, dear, call thy mither wi' thine own pratty voice, she will come to thee! she will come to thee."

"Blessed words!" with wild, delirious joy, cried our heroine, throwing herself at her father's feet, clasping his hands, raising them to her lips, covering them with her kisses, and bathing them with her tears; "he calls upon my name, he own me dear to his heart, the poor afflicted parent again acknowledges the child so long estranged from him, and I am happy. Father, dear father, Phoebe, your own Phoebe, in all the purity of love and reverence she has ever felt for you, is here, and on her knees, with throbbing, bursting heart, craves, implores your blessing!"

The old man looked earnestly in the pale and anxious face of his daughter for a second or two, and with some degree of pity, and affection. A ray of reason for an instant seemed to fall upon his brain, and light up his eyes, but it was for an instant only, the dark cloud came again, fearful was the immediate change that his features underwent, and fiercely dashing the unhappy Phoebe from him, with a loud cry of mingled rage and horror, he rushed madly from the cottage, closely pursued by the keepers.

Phoebe uttered an exclamation of despair, and again became insensible.

Henry Ashford raised her, and gently placing her in one of the old arm chairs, watched her with feelings of anguish as only one who loved so truly and so fondly as he

did, could experience, while his sister, as deeply affected as himself, exerted herself for her recovery.

CHAPTER LXXI.

ANOTHER SCENE OF EXCITEMENT.

And so the fond scheme for the restoration of the unfortunate Mark Mayfield to his senses, upon which they had all so long built their dearest hopes, was a failure, and all chance of success in the accomplishment of their most anxious wishes appeared to be at an end.

The poor old man was overtaken by the keepers, and Mr. Stubbles and his wife, when he had only got a short distance from the cottage, and with much difficulty reconducted to the house of the latter, and removed to his old apartment, where he continued in a state of the most painful excitement throughout the day and during the night.

It was some time ere our heroine was restored to consciousness, and then as the recollection of all that had taken place rushed with overwhelming force upon her brain, the agony she experienced was almost too great for endurance, and would admit of no remonstrance or consolation, although Henry and his sister exerted themselves to the utmost to impart it to her.

"Alas," she sighed, "every effort, every scheme, every tender endeavour are useless; fate, cruel fate wills it, and the senses of my poor father are fled for ever. Oh, what bitter feelings of anguish, regret, and despair does that thought inflict, how can I ever again know real happiness or peace of mind while that terrible certainty exists?"

"Nay, dear Phoebe," returned her lover, sad as I admit this result of our first experiment to be, and painful as is the disappointment, you must not yet give way entirely to despair; for I trust that in time, and when your father has frequently repeated his visits to this his once happy home, reason will gradually dawn upon him, and continue to grow in strength, until it shall happily have regained all its former vigour."

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Amy, hopefully, fervently, "it will, it must be so, all merciful heaven will not suffer the good old man, whose whole career has been one of uninterrupted virtue and integrity, to remain much longer in his present state of darkness and heavy affliction. Cheer you then, Phoebe, and endeavour still to look forward with hope and confidence to the good time coming."

"Gentle, kind, and sympathising friend,

sister, for by that endearing name alone should I call you," said Phoebe, affectionately, and throwing her fair arms around Amy's neck; "how can I refuse to yield to your fond persuasions and advice, dictated as I know they are by the purest motives? Yes, I will indeed try to struggle against my feelings, notwithstanding this painful disappointment, I will put my trust in the mercy of the Supreme, and still hope on, still hope on."

"Dearest Phoebe," ejaculated Henry, cheerfully, "what delight, what gratification it affords me to hear you talk thus, continue to keep in the same refreshing and encouraging state of mind that you are now, and depend upon it that the time is not far distant when you will be fully rewarded by the gratification of all your fondest and most ardent wishes."

Phoebe smiled sweetly upon him through her tears, and taking his arm and that of Amy, after casting one lingering look around the little room, and on its homely contents, suffered them to conduct her towards the farm, it having been previously arranged that one of the villagers, a comfortable old woman, should occupy the cottage rent-free, and with some trifling weekly allowance, in order to see to it, and to keep everything in the same precise manner in which they were at present arranged.

Another month elapsed without any material change taking place. Mark had again become calm, though it required the greatest care and attention to keep him so, and it had not been thought advisable to let him again visit the cottage at present, lest that, in the delicate state of his mind, the sight of it might have the contrary effect to that which his friends so anxiously desired.

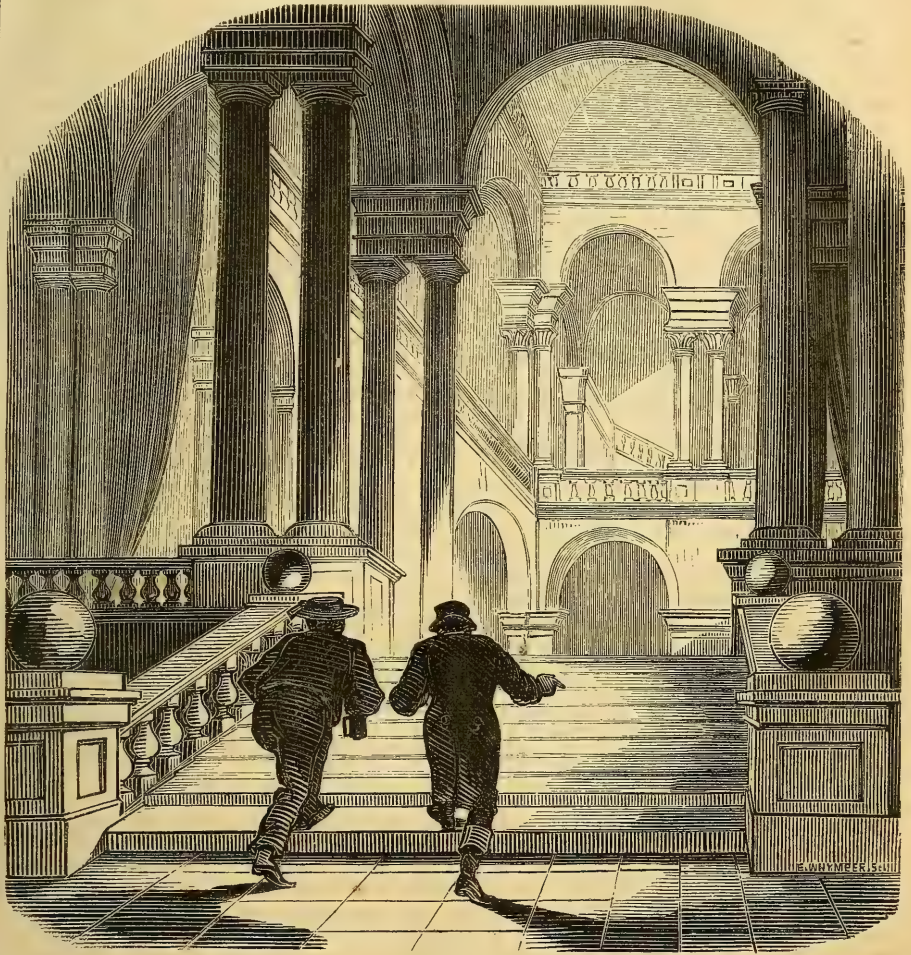
Phoebe never saw the poor afflicted old man, except by stealth, when he was taking his daily walks in the grounds attached to the mansion of Mr. Stubbles, in the charge of his keepers; but that afforded her some degree of melancholy satisfaction, as she watched the daily favourable change which was taking place in his looks and manners.

All things continued to prosper with Henry Ashford in his comfortable little farm, and the continued malady of Mark Mayfield was the only drawback to the complete happiness of them all.

But an event was about to take place to shock the feelings of Phoebe, and to reawaken some of the most torturing recollections in her mind.

Not a day did our heroine suffer to pass without her visiting the cottage, and in assisting the old woman who inhabited it in keeping it in the most neat and cleanly order.

She was usually accompanied in those



visits either by Henry or his sister, but when business detained them at the farm, she would ramble there alone, and remain there for hours, pondering over everything the cottage contained, which could recal the memory of the past, or engaged in agreeable conversation with the aged occupant, who was a most intelligent woman for one in her humble station of society.

It was on one of those occasions that Phoebe had prolonged her visit to the cottage considerably beyond the usual time, that the exciting and painful event occurred to her which we are now about to relate.

The last beams of the setting sun were just fading away in the western horizon, as she issued from the cottage; but the evening being remarkably fine, she felt in no particular hurry to reach the farm, but walked

leisurely on, enjoying the beauty of the scenery, especially in that sweet tranquil hour.

She had passed through the pretty little of Dewsbury, and entering the pathway which led over flower-bedecked fields and meadows to the farm, and had arrived at a romantic spot at no great distance from it, when she was somewhat startled by the sudden appearance of a man—of gentlemanly bearing—from among the trees that grew near, and who abruptly stopped as he saw her approach, and seemed struck with her appearance, and lost in wonder and admiration.

Phoebe also paused, and as she looked eagerly towards the supposed stranger, she felt a strange sensation agitate her breast, for which she was totally at a loss to account.

The gentleman, however, seemed quickly

to recover from his amazement, and his curiosity evidently excited, he advanced with a respectful air towards her, Phoebe being too much embarrassed to be able to move from the spot on which she was standing.

But no sooner had he got near enough to enable them both to have a more distinct view of each other's features, than a mutual exclamation of astonishment and agony escaped their lips, and our heroine must have sunk on the earth, quite overpowered by the wild emotions that rushed tumultuously to her heart, had she not been caught in the arms of—Lord Selborne!

Yes, the painful and long dreaded meeting between Phoebe Mayfield, and the suffering, penitent nobleman to whom she owed all her sorrows and misfortunes had at last taken place, and to describe the mingled and agonising feeling that agitated them both would be a difficult task for even the most powerful pen to accomplish.

It was several minutes before either of them could speak, and our heroine could only gaze with bewildered and reproachful eyes, and looks of terror, shame, and disgust at her betrayer, while an expression of the most mournful regret and supplication agitated his careworn features, and the colour rose and gave place to sickly palor in his cheeks.

So confused and astonished was poor Phoebe, at a meeting so wholly unexpected and revolting to her feelings, that she had not the power to attempt to withdraw herself from the arms of Selborne, whose touch now seemed contamination to her; and he retained her in his hold with convulsive eagerness, yet with a feeling of the most excruciating anguish, dread and remorse.

"Phoebe, deeply-wronged, and long-suffering girl," he at length with difficulty gasped forth, in a voice half stifled with emotion, "well may you fix upon the wretched Selborne those looks of terror, hatred, and disgust, for he deserves it all, and—"

His feelings overpowered him, and he could not finish the sentence, but he looked at Phoebe with such an heartfelt expression of pity, anguish, regret, and supplication, that, in spite of all she had so cruelly, so severely suffered from his treachery and deceit, it was almost enough to move her to compassion.

But the tones of his well known voice aroused her from her temporary confusion into action, and withdrawing herself from his hold with a look of horror and indignation, she exclaimed—

"Evil genius of my unhappy fate, hypocrite, deceiver, what accursed accident has again brought you into my loathing presence? Dare you look upon, much more venture to address that unfortunate being whom you

have so basely, cruelly wronged—whose hopes you have annihilated, whose prospect you have blighted, and whom your vile artifices plunged into shame and degradation? Leave me, begone, for bitter curses are rising to my lips that should sink you in the earth from human sight to hear them. Begone, I say, and never more venture to appal and disgust me by your detested presence."

Lord Selborne shrunk aghast, conscience-stricken beneath those withering words, and the looks which accompanied them, and still convulsively retaining his hold of her hand, in spite of her efforts to withdraw it, it was not for a minute or two that he could sufficiently conquer his emotion to make any reply.

"For the love of heaven, Phoebe, I implore you forbear those bitter reproaches, which I own I so richly merit, and hear me," he at length ejaculated, and his whole frame was convulsed frightfully, and trembled violently with the overwhelming power of his excited feelings, "oh, I acknowledge that I have been most cruel, most guilty, but did you know that which I have so long suffered—how sincere has been my penitence, how bitter my remorse, how constant and fervent my prayers to offended heaven for forgiveness, and for your restoration to peace and happiness, how great my anxiety to make you all the atonement in my power, methinks that even you must pity the wretched being, who now with all humility and shame sues to you, although, alas, he can never, never hope for your forgiveness."

"Pity," repeated our heroine, with a look of scorn, that was even more torturing, more withering to the soul of the distracted nobleman than her severest reproaches, "and dare you whose brutal conduct broke my poor mother's heart, and robbed my aged father of the light of reason; dare you who lured me from the path of virtue and innocence, and after you had accomplished your diabolical designs, drove me forth a wretched degraded outcast on the wide and desert world, abandoned the once simple, happy, village maiden to the most terrible misery—dare you, I say, with all this fearful weight of crime upon your conscience, and the curses of outraged heaven upon your head, insult mine ears by supplicating me for pity? No, disgust, hatred, scorn, maledictions, are alone your due from me, your unhappy victim. Let me begone, for my blood freezes with horror, and I shrink appalled while I gaze on one so deeply steeped in crime, so justly loathed."

As she thus spoke, her fine eyes flashing with resentment, and her bosom swelling with emotion, she again endeavoured to withdraw her hand, and to tear herself away, but he still tried to detain her, and with

looks of the most possible intense agony, for he could not speak, implored her forbearance.

It was useless, the feeling of loathing and disgust was too deeply impressed upon her mind for anything that he could urge her to do to remove it, and at length by an extraordinary effort she released herself from his hold, and rushed precipitately and wildly from the spot in the direction of the farm, as though she were flying from some savage beast, or something equally fearful.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE ANGUISH OF REFLECTION.

Paralysed, horror-struck, half mad with despair, and with the fearful words, and just but withering, crushing reproaches of the poor girl still ringing in his ears, Lord Selborne stood transfixed to the spot, and gazing after her retreating form till it was hidden from his sight, and then he burst forth into a violent paroxysm of grief, beating his breast and forehead, and groaning aloud in his insupportable agony.

"'Tis done," he said, at last, "the long wished for but dreaded meeting has taken place; she has loaded me with her bitter reproaches and just invectives, assured me of her utter contempt and loathing, and my poisoned cup of misery is now filled to the brim. I am now indeed a wretch accursed, hateful to myself, and despised by all my fellow creatures, whom conscience will not suffer me to look in the face, and who should rightly shun me as one with whom 'tis dangerous to come in contact. And can I continue to live, with all this terrible weight of shame and guilt upon my soul? I cannot, I dare not, and yet do I fear to die. Oh, vice, black-hearted, reckless vice, how dreadful is the punishment, which sooner or later is sure to overtake your wretched misguided votaries. Oh, what can I do, whither can I go to fly from the harrowing feelings of an upbraiding conscience?"

Again he struck his burning forehead, and beat his breast, in all the frenzy of madness and despair, then having cast one eager, lingering look in the direction which Phoebe had taken, he walked slowly from the spot, and made his way to the gloom and solitude of the neighbouring wood, not daring at present, in such a state of mind to return to the inn at which he had been staying for the last day or two.

For the last few months Lord Selborne had been wandering about from place to place in different parts of the country, a wretched man, without being able to find the least rest, hope, consolation or where-

ever he went, and every day, every hour seeming to bring him nearer to despair.

Society—which might probably, had he sought it, been the means of partly arousing him—was irksome and disgusting to him, and he avoided it all that he could, leading the life of a perfect misanthrope, and indulging alone in the gloomy and racking thoughts that constantly beset his brain.

At times he was worked up to such a fearful pitch that he was almost driven to lay violent hands upon himself, but an invisible power restrained him, and still ordained that he should continue to live one of the most miserable of human beings, still suffer on.

The sight he had obtained of Phoebe, in the cottage of Henry Ashford and his sister, could never be effaced from his memory, and torturing indeed were the thoughts which that recollection engendered.

He almost regretted that he had left without revealing himself, and in spite of the painful results which he had too much reason to anticipate, solicit her mercy and forgiveness, brave at once her reproaches, and ascertain his fate.

But at length after the lapse of several months, he finally made up his mind, notwithstanding everything which might follow, to return to the neighbourhood of the village, and there he had arrived only two days previously to the one, on which the affecting and exciting scene taking place, which has been described in the previous chapter.

He made such inquiries at the inn where he put up, as he thought would obtain him the information he sought, and he was not disappointed, for he was furnished with all those particulars of the change in the circumstances of Henry Ashford and his sister, and their removal from the cottage to the farm, together with Phoebe, with which the reader has been already made acquainted.

He could not but feel the greatest satisfaction at the good fortune which had befallen Henry Ashford, the more so as it would be the means of adding to the comfort and welfare of poor Phoebe, and might probably tend in a great measure to re-establish that peace of mind to which she had so long been a stranger.

Lord Selborne had also been made acquainted with the particulars of the restoration of Phoebe's once happy home, and the melancholy scene which had taken place there on the occasion of the poor old man's visit to it, and that circumstance, and the suffering it must have cost her, affected him, if possible, more than anything else.

When the shadows of evening had fallen around, and he thought that there might be no one to observe him, Lord Selborne wandered towards the farm, as he had been directed, and for some time he walked around

it, and watched for the opportunity of being able to catch a glimpse of Phoebe, if only for an instant, with the most trembling anxiety, and hope yet dread.

But he saw no one, and at length tired with watching, he, with a heavy heart, slowly and reluctantly retired from the spot.

A feeling of painful curiosity which he could not restrain or resist, now urged him to visit the cottage, once the peaceful dwelling of Phoebe and her parents, and, after looking round, to see that he was not observed by any one, he quickened his speed, and took the direction which led to it.

The moon was shining brightly when he reached it, and as it was thus revealed to him in all its former simple beauty, he could not help giving vent to a burst of emotion that the sight of it, and the torturing recollections which it awakened in his mind, called forth.

The evening, the fatal evening on which he had succeeded in enticing poor Phoebe from that sweet home of her happy childhood and innocence, rushed so vividly on his memory that it almost overwhelmed him, and never had the enormity of his guilt, and the helplessness of remorse, the utter impossibility to make any adequate atonement, appeared to him so forcibly as at that moment.

He dared not approach the cottage nearer, in the casement of which he could perceive a glimmering light, which convinced him that it was occupied, and he continued fixed to the spot on which he was standing, with maddening thoughts racking his bewildered brain, and his conscience a prey to the most bitter self reproaches.

"Villain that I must have been," he mournfully soliloquised, to lure one so good, so artless, and so innocent from her fond parent's arms, and to render this humble dwelling desolate. Oh, I can never find words sufficiently severe and bitter to reproach myself. Heaven pardon me, for terrible indeed is that for which I have to answer. But dare I longer venture to contemplate a scene which brings such harrowing recollections to my memory? No, no, I cannot, I shall go mad if I remain here longer. Let me be gone. Oh, Phoebe, much wronged Phoebe.

He cast one more sad and lingering look towards the cottage as he thus spoke, then covering his face with his hands, he staggered half stupified from the spot.

Sleepless and wretched was the night passed by Lord Selborne after visiting this scene, with which and himself so fearful a tale of guilt was connected; and the longer he reflected upon all the dismal circumstances, the more poignant became his grief, the more settled his despair.

Anxious as he was again to behold Phoebe, he dreaded to encounter her, and he trembled and hesitated what to do.

Still a sort of spell, a kind of infatuation which he could not resist, that urged him again to visit the cottage, and he was on the way thither from the inn, when he so suddenly and so unexpectedly encountered the object of his anxious thoughts.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

AGITATION OF PHOEBE.—THE SYBIL.

How poor Phoebe reached the farm after the trying scene between herself and her betrayer, the man whom she had never wished and never expected to behold again, it would be almost impossible properly to describe.

Terror gave speed to her feet, and she hurried wildly on as though she was flying from some frightful monster, never once venturing to look back to see whether Selborne was pursuing her, although from the emotion he had evinced, she imagined that he would neither have the courage or the power to do so.

With breathless haste, and looks disordered, she at length reached the farm, rushed with the speed of the affrighted deer across the yard, and finding the door open, she staggered into the house, and sunk insensible in a chair, much to the astonishment and consternation of Henry and his sister, who had been for some time anxiously and impatiently awaiting her return home.

"Gracious heaven!" exclaimed Henry and Amy in a breath, as they hastened to her assistance; "what can be the meaning of this? How pale and disordered she looks, oh, what can now have happened thus to alarm and agitate her? Will there never be an end to these continual shocks and surprises?"

"It is imprudent to let her take these melancholy rambles alone, and it must, if possible, be avoided in future," observed Amy, as she applied such restoratives, as were likely to revive her.

"It must have been something serious to excite her thus," said Henry; "and I am all impatience to learn the nature of it. Poor girl, she seems destined ever to meet with some fresh trouble.

"Alas, that is but too true," coincided Amy, "and may God give her strength to bear up against such continual shocks. But, see, she revives. Dear Phoebe."

Our heroine stared vacantly at her and Henry for an instant, then gazing fearfully and anxiously around the room, as if expecting

to see some ghastly object, and in a faint and agitated voice she said:—

"He is not here, I do not gaze upon his hated form; thank heaven, I have escaped from him."

"Escaped from whom, dear Phoebe?" eagerly inquired her lover, "whom do you mean?"

"He, the villain, the betrayer of female virtue and innocence, Selborne!" replied Phoebe, with a shudder of horror and disgust.

"Nay, Phoebe," remarked Amy, "you must have suffered your imagination to mislead you, surely you are labouring under some strange and painful delusion of the senses."

"No, no," replied our heroine impatiently; "it is no delusion. But a short time since he crossed my path, forcibly detained me, and dared to insult mine ears by hypocritical professions of repentance, imploring me for pity, and offering to make atonement. Atonement, oh, what atonement can such a heartless villain as he is make for the cruel wrongs he has done me?"

"Can this be possible?" said Henry, with a look of the most unfeigned astonishment and incredulity.

"It is true," answered Phoebe, positively, "I repeat that a short time since Lord Selborne, on my way home from the cottage, crossed my path, detained me, and that we had a long and painful interview. Think not that my mind is wandering, oh, no it is too true."

"Then he is probably staying somewhere in the neighbourhood," observed Henry; "this is unfortunate. Wretched, guilty man, what can have induced him again to venture hither?"

"With the hope to persuade me to believe in the sincerity of his remorse and penitence," answered our heroine, and to seek my forgiveness. But I loaded him with my reproaches, and was half disposed to invoke heaven's most terrible curses, but some invisible power restrained my tongue, and forcing myself from his hated hold, I fled him as I would a pestilence."

Her looks as she gave utterance to these words, fully revealed the feelings of indignation and disgust that filled her breast, and it was some time ere she could in the slightest degree regain her composure, Amy and her brother warmly sympathising with her, and fully participating in her emotions.

At length Phoebe sufficiently recovered herself to relate the particulars of all that had passed between her and Lord Selborne, and the attention and surprise with which they listened to her may be imagined.

"Misguided nobleman," said Amy, "what misery have his errors been the unhappy

cause of to himself and others. Indeed his penitence does appear to be sincere, Phoebe, and I could almost feel disposed to pity him."

"Beware, Amy," said our heroine, "you know not the real hypocrisy of Lord Selborne's character, or you would not be so readily disposed to trust his present professions."

"True," coincided Henry, "after conduct so base as his has been, it is difficult to place much confidence in his present assertions, even if he does feel acutely all the horrors of anguish and remorse, he is but justly punished for the cruel wrongs he has inflicted on one who so little deserved them."

"Oh, heaven grant," ejaculated Phoebe, fervently, "that I may never more behold him, for the sight of him has awakened thoughts feelings and recollections in my breast, that I would fain seek to stifle for ever."

"And you must still persevere, dear Phoebe," observed her lover, "and endeavour to do so. In future it would not be advisable for you to venture abroad unless accompanied by myself or my sister."

To this Phoebe agreed, and she then sought to tranquillise her feelings, and to banish the exciting adventure of the evening from her memory; but for the present at any rate it was impossible for her to do so.

Henry Ashford, too, although he concealed his real thoughts as well as he could, could not but feel uneasy and anxious at the circumstance of the re-appearance of Lord Selborne in that part of the country, and the painful reflections which her interview with that guilty nobleman would naturally cause Phoebe. But any feeling of doubt, misgiving, or jealousy, never for a moment entered his breast, he felt a sweet confidence in the fervour and sincerity of her love, and that her betrayer now held no other place in her bosom but that of the utmost disgust and abhorrence; and that thought consoled and cheered him, and inspired him with every hope.

Some further time was occupied in conversation, when Phoebe and Amy separated from Henry for the night, and retired to their chamber.

But to return to Lord Selborne.

After our heroine had left him, as has been before stated, he sought the gloom and solitude of the wood, in a state of mind, the agony of which was almost insupportable, and throwing himself upon the grass, beneath the shadow of some tall trees, he abandoned himself entirely to the utter misery of his own thoughts.

Still every word that Phoebe had uttered in the bitterness of her reproaches seemed to ring in his ears, and were stamped upon

his memory in characters the impression of which nothing could ever efface.

His brain was racked almost to madness, and he sought in vain to find some means of hope and consolation. He felt most keenly how richly he merited every word of withering reproach which had escaped her lips, and he looked in vain to find some means of self-extermination. The longer he reflected on the past, the more guilty did he appear to be, and most bitterly did he feel his own debasement, and despised and loathed himself.

"Of what avail are rank, title, wealth, now to me?" he sighed, "can they afford me one moment's respite from the heavy weight of care and misery that constantly press upon my burning brain—stifle the voice of an upbraiding conscience, or purchase an oblivion of the guilty past? No, they cannot, and I am a wretch so accursed, that even the most miserable of human beings, steeped in the very lowest depths of poverty, must be happy compared with me. Phoebe justly hates and despises me; that feeling I am convinced can never be eradicated from her breast, and all the atonement I am so willing and so anxious to make is scornfully rejected by her, and thus every ray of hope or consolation is excluded from my distracted mind. Would to heaven that this torturing interview had not taken place, for the remembrance of it will but serve more strongly to embitter my future days, and reveal to me in still more glowing colours my own natural deformity, and the contempt, the thorough contempt with which I must be looked upon by others. Would that I were dead, for this life of misery is too painful, far too painful for human endurance."

He paused in his soliloquy, for his emotions overpowered him, but still he remained reclining upon the earth, in the gloom of the forest, wrapped in the same torturing meditations, and unable to make up his mind to return to the inn.

"I must not again behold her," he at length resumed, "no, the sight of me does but serve to excite her terror, and why should I thus add to the misery which my guilt has already inflicted on her? It must have been madness that again guided my footsteps hither, but I will delay my departure no longer than to-morrow, and never more venture near the scenes of my former guilt, and which cannot fail to awaken so many agonising remembrances. Let me wander to some dreary wild, where the foot of civilised man has never trod, and hide my shame and infamy from mortal sight; it matters not now whither I go, or what becomes of me."

He rose to his feet with the intention to leave the wood, and to return to the inn,

when he was surprised to behold the shadow of a human form upon the grass near him, and looking hastily round, the repulsive features of the old gipsy sybil met his, being fixed with the same disagreeable grin of exultation as usual upon him.

As the mysterious woman stood—in her half bent attitude, as she leaned forward with pointing bony fingers and twinkling eyes, and sardonic, shrivelled features—near the withered trunk of an old tree, and partly in the pale and sickly moonbeams, that broke through the thick foliage, there was something so unearthly in her appearance, and so strikingly impressive, that in spite of himself, Lord Selborne could not help a feeling of awe, fast approaching to terror, stealing over him, and this was increased when he recalled to his memory all the sybil's predictions—from the moment she had first crossed his path, namely, that fatal evening when himself and the unfortunate Phoebe were pursuing their way to London—and the strange and fearful manner in which they had been fulfilled.

His lordship could not but feel uneasy in her presence, especially in his present state of mind, and the old woman evidently noticing his emotion, seemed to chuckle and exult the more.

She, however, changed not her attitude, or attempted to move from the spot, and Lord Selborne continued for a few moments to stare at her aghast, and without being able to utter a word.

The strange woman was the first to break the gloomy and painful silence, and in her usual croaking and discordant tones she said—

"Well met, my Lord Selborne, 'tis long since you and I had the pleasure of seeing each other before, and I greet you on the auspicious occasion. Well met, my Lord Selborne, well met."

"Mysterious woman," replied the bewildered and agitated nobleman, partially, however recovering himself, and with some degree of firmness, "for what purpose do you now come? what brings you hither, and what would you with me?"

"To assist your own conscience in reminding you of the past, and to warn you of the future," replied the sybil.

"Begone, I will not listen to you."

"But you must—nay, you shall. So you have seen her, the fair, the gentle, the too confiding, and the betrayed; the unhappy victim of your base artifices. You have seen her again, I say, the poor wreck of what was once so beautiful and innocent; the sight should have struck you dead; you have dared to speak to her, you have heard her words of indignation, loathing, and reproach; they should have destroyed your

every faculty—withered your very soul, and—”

“Hold!” interrupted Lord Selborne, with increased agitation, “how know you this?”

“How know I, ha! ha!” laughed the old woman scornfully; “what is there that I know not? Oh, it was a brave, an honourable, and virtuous deed, to triumph o’er the innocence and inexperience of one so young, and tender, and so unsuspecting, it was a worthy act to break the fond mother’s heart, and drive to hopeless madness the wretched aged father. Those deeds have borne rare fruit, my Lord Selborne, and there is more to come, there is more to come.”

“Mercy, mercy,” groaned the distracted nobleman, abject, humiliated; “oh, spare me, I own my guilt, and great is my contrition.”

“Ah, you repent now, but it is too late, the terrible hour of retribution will come, and you cannot avoid it. Mark me, a deed of blood must be accomplished, and strange secrets must be divulged, ere the libertine can make ample atonement for the wrongs he has inflicted, or the innocent be restored to peace and happiness. Remember.”

As the old woman uttered the latter words, in tones both solemn and impressive, she moved from the spot on which she had been standing, slowly at first, and looking earnestly at the astonished and terrified Lord Selborne all the time, then with a sudden quick movement, she vanished so quickly so instantaneously, and so completely out of sight, that it seemed more the effect of magic than of anything else, and Lord Selborne looked in the direction in which she had disappeared, scarcely able to believe the evidence of his senses.

For some minutes he remained upon the spot, his eyes glaring upon vacancy, his brain racked, and bewildered, and his whole frame violently agitated, then gloomily pondering in a state of mind which need not be described, upon the extraordinary, and exciting events of the evening, he slowly retraced his steps to the inn.

The following morning, at an early hour, according to the resolution he had formed, but without any fixed place of destination, Lord Selborne took his departure.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

A BURGLARY PLANNED AND DECIDED ON.

Once more we must pursue those worthy gentlemen, Beaufort and Sam Filcher in their guilty career.

The attack on the thieves haunt in Westminster, the escape of Beaufort and his

associate in crime, and their subsequent departure to the rendezvous at the other end of the town, have already been minutely described, and it is unnecessary to allude to it any further here any more than to state, that now finding themselves for the present in safety, the two villains sat down contentedly for the rest of the night to enjoy themselves, and to endeavour to calm their somewhat ruffled feelings, after the extraordinary excitement they had undergone.

This they accomplished after their usual fashion, namely by drinking to excess, by dissipation, noise, riot, and blackguardism, and it was not until daylight forced its way in at the dirty windows of the room in which they were congregated together, that they and their vile companions thought of breaking up their drunken revels, several of them having fallen to sleep hours before, some with their heads on the tables, and others stretched at full length with the bare floor for a mattress.

Beaufort and Filcher having consulted together, thought it advisable to take up their quarters at this den, altogether, for a few days, “on the quiet,” as the latter suggested, until the excitement of the recent events had blown over, and they had been able to arrange their plans for the future, and they did so accordingly.

In the meantime they heard of the departure of Lord Selborne once more from London, and thus the designs of Beaufort were again delayed for an indefinite period, although he was fully determined that they should be ultimately accomplished, even at every risk.

“An idea has just entered my head,” observed the sagacious Mr. Sam Filcher, one evening, when he and Beaufort were sitting by themselves in a little room at the back of the den, talking over their own private affairs; “I’ve got a splendid idea, captain, in my head, which I think if we only work the oracle right, we might turn to advantage.”

“What’s that?” demanded Beaufort, hastily.

“Oh, its quite in our line, you’re sure,” returned his companion.

“Well, and what is it?”

“Merely a little bit of a *crack*, which if we mind what we’re about, and play our cards rightly, I think will produce us something worth while, something that will pay us for the trouble and risk.”

“A burglary?”

“Vhy, yes,” replied Sam, “if you like that word better, but it don’t sound business-like.

“Where?” interrogated Beaufort.

“Can’t you guess?” said Sam.

“Fool,” answered his companion, angrily and impatiently; “how should I be able to do so?”

"At Lord Selborne's," whispered Sam, with a chuckle of self congratulation.

Beaufort started.

"What the devil could put such a thought as that into your head, Sam?"

"Oh, I've always an eye to b'sness you know," said the latter, "but isn't it a good idea?"

"Humph, I don't know," remarked Beaufort, "I must consider of it."

"His lordship rather disappointed you on your last visit to him," continued Sam; "and its only fair that you should try to make up for it. He's now out of town, there's plenty of plate and other articles of value, I dare say, in the mansion, which are worth the looking after, and if we go to work cautiously, and play our cards cleverly, we make a profitable night's work of it. What do you say to it, guvner?"

"It is worthy of consideration, Sam," returned Beaufort, after a minute or two's reflection, "should it be successful, it would not only secure us a valuable booty, but would likewise be a glorious revenge against Selborne for his resistance to my demands. I thank you for the suggestion, Sam, it is worthy of you."

"Come, I say captain," remarked Filcher, with an assumption of modesty which was by no means part and parcel of his character; "cut it, will yer, Sam Filcher is always ready and willing to do a sensible and clever thing, but if there is anything as does make him blush more than another, it is flattery. That here's a commodity as his delicate, and retirin' natur' will not allow him to stand at all."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Beaufort; "I believe you Sam, I know your sensitive and modest disposition, and admire you for it."

"Thank yer, captain, for the compliment, yer see one can't help one's temper, and as for modesty and amiability, its not my fault yer see, if I possess so much of 'em, because I was borne so. But that here's nothing to do with what we were talking about. I suppose the crack as I've proposed, seeming to meet your approbation, is a settled case?"

Beaufort replied in the affirmative, in fact, the villain was well satisfied with the diabolical suggestion of his reckless and abandoned associate, and after a pause, he added.

"I am most sanguine as to the result of this scheme, Filcher, but you are aware, as well as myself, that it is a desperate one, and fraught with no little danger. We must take time to consider it, and mature our plans."

"To be sure we must, captain," coincided Sam Filcher; "its always best to take time to consider everything, in order to do the business properly, though I can't say but

the Sprig of Myrtle was always in a hurry to polish his man off like a flash of lightnin', when he fit in the ring. You'll find me up to my work in this bus'ness."

"I hope so, but shall we require assistance?"

"Why, as to that," replied Sam; "the less we have in the job, the better, and I think we can manage it without any other help than our old friend Jarvey Bob, and we can't do without him to be in waitin' to remove ourselves and the swag, you know. We can trust him, for he's as blind as a bat, and as deaf as a door post, when he's paid for it. As for the Charley, we're safe to find him asleep, as usual, in his box."

"True," said Beaufort.

"You are pretty well acquainted with the house, captain," remarked Filcher.

"Yes," said Beaufort in reply; "and I think an entrance may be easily effected at the back, without alarming the servants, by means of a coach-house which communicates with the premises. Once in, we will soon find our way to the plate, &c., never fear."

"All right," approved the worthy Mr. Filcher, "so far then, so good, and its a settled point."

"It is," answered Beaufort, "and I prophecy success. Money we must have, by some means or other, and should we not be disappointed in the undertaking, we shall no doubt get sufficient to enable us to retire from business for awhile, and retire into the country or on the continent, where we may be in safety."

"Yes, and live like gentlemen," said Sam, with one of his most facetious grins, "come out as swells of the first water, as we ought to do, eh? That would be the ticket, eh?"

With these sensible observations Beaufort coincided, and after ordering a fresh supply of refreshments, which was brought them, and having no one to interrupt them, or to overhear them—the room in which the black-guard and desperate guests generally assembled being in a remote part of the house—the two ruffians sat down deliberately to discuss their nefarious designs, which they did to their mutual satisfaction, and before they rejoined their companions, who they began to fear might have their suspicions and their curiosity inconveniently excited, they had so far matured their plans, as to present a probability of their being put into execution with as little delay as possible.

Elated at the prospect of success, and the good fortune that was in store for them, they entered with more than their accustomed spirit into the revelries of the evening, amongst their guilty associates, and it was not until a late hour that they thought of retiring to the room in this den of infamy, in which they both slept.



The more I think of this design," observed Beaufort, when him and Sam were again alone, "the more pleased I am with it, and sanguine as to its success."

"Yes, captain," replied Filcher, "I think there is very little doubt about that, and I think I have done credit to my ingenuity and attention to business in a throwing out the hint."

"You have," answered Beaufort, "but enough has been said upon that subject. It is fortunate that Lord Selborne is away from town."

"Why so?" inquired Sam.

"Because he might have presented some obstacle to the completion of our plot," replied Beaufort.

"None at all," differed Filcher, "how could he? On the contrary, if his lordship

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had been in the house there might have been a richer booty for us; and should he have discovered us, while in the execution of our design, and attempted to raise an alarm, I dare say we should not have been without the means of silencing him. You understand me."

"Hold, Sam," said Beaufort, grasping the hardened miscreant's wrist, and looking in his face with a mingled expression of disgust and horror, "hold, or you and I may quarrel. You are always too hasty, too rash, and ready to do that which there is no necessity for, in short, you are a reckless villain, and seem to take a savage delight in carrying your villainy to the fullest extent."

"Thank yer for the compliment," returned the ruffian with a sardonic grin; "but what are you aiming at now?"

"Hark ye," said his companion, "and mark my words, under any circumstances there must be no bloodshed in this business. It can be managed without, if not it must be abandoned."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sam, ironically, "why, what a particular and sentimental—don't they call it—and squeamish fellow you have become, captain. Burglary on the most moral principals. Now I suppose you would plunder a person on the highway in such a polite and gentlemanly style that he would almost feel a pleasure in being robbed by you, and even respectfully request you to repeat the compliment. Ha, ha, ha. As for standing up in your own defence in case he should ride rusty, I suppose you couldn't do so even if it was to save your precious neck from the halter. Bah."

"No foolery, Sam," returned Beaufort, sternly, "you are, I repeat a desperate, hardened scoundrel, and prepared for anything, however atrocious. I also confess myself to be a villain, inured to every crime save that of murder, which, although I was constantly witnessing it when with the pirates, I always avoided taking any active part in them. Thief I am, and everything else that is bad, but I never yet was, and never shall become, I hope, a murderer."

"A pretty sermon, truly, guvner," said Filcher, sneeringly, and with a look of the most ineffable scorn, "needs must you know when the devil drives, and you can't say what you might be compelled to do under difficulties, and to save yourself from the hands of the executioner."

"Enough of this," said Beaufort, angrily and impatiently, "I am not in a humour for it."

"Well," returned Filcher, "scarcely, however, with the brutal thoughts that occupied him, able to suppress a laugh of derision, "we will not fall out about that. It is enough that we are agreed upon the other part of the business, eh?"

Beaufort merely nodded assent, but returned no verbal answer, for the observations of Sam had awakened unpleasant thoughts in his breast, and he could not turn a deaf ear to the voice of conscience.

Sam Filcher soon afterwards retired to bed, and quickly went soundly to sleep, snoring loudly, as if he was one of the best and happiest fellows in the world, and with not a sin to reproach himself with.

But Beaufort, not feeling inclined for sleep, threw himself in a chair by one of the windows, and abandoned himself to gloomy thought.

It will have been seen from the few observations that had thus passed between him and Sam Filcher on the subject of the projected burglary, that although Beaufort in

all other respects was a most consummate villain, he was not yet entirely lost to every feeling of humanity; he had never yet, throughout his whole career of infamy, imbrued his hands in human blood; he had indeed an instinctive horror of bloodshed, and the monstrous observations therefore of his companion in guilt, had naturally aroused his indignation, and excited his horror, and the horror of those observations was increased in reference to Lord Selborne, for deeply as he had already wronged that misguided nobleman, and still contemplated doing, notwithstanding he had made him his dupe to an unlimited extent, and had lured him into most of the vices of which he had been guilty, he shuddered at the idea of becoming his murderer, even by accident, and if his lordship had been at present residing in town, probably he would have been induced to abandon all idea of the burglary, rather than have run the risk, in a moment of personal danger, of being hurried into the perpetration of so dreadful a crime.

He could not forget the happy innocent boyish days they had passed together, and painful compunctious thoughts frequently racked his brain, and caused him many a pang, when those joyous, guileless days were renewed to his memory.

In fact, with all his crimes, the light of all that was goop was not quite extinguished in the breast of the once fashionable roué, Captain Beaufort, and there were moments when he reflected upon the past with the most bitter feelings of remorse, and wished himself the same happy and innocent being that he had been in his days of childhood.

It was such thoughts as these that the hardened scoundrel Sam Filcher had now awakened, and unable in spite of all his efforts, to resist their influence, for some time he abandoned himself to them.

He would have been glad could he have extricated himself from his present life of crime, and have redeemed the past, but that was impossible—his character had long since gone, past recall, he had abused and squandered fortune's gifts, he had proceeded too far in the path of guilt to retrace his steps; the brand of felon was stamped upon his brow, the outraged laws of his country claimed him, and even if penitent, and willing to make every atonement in his power, an ignominious fate too surely awaited him, and he had no alternative but to continue in the same guilty course he had so long been pursuing, and to seek to avoid that fate as long as he possibly could.

In fact, the guilty Beaufort, coupling all his numerous vices, and his very few remaining good qualities together, was a kind of living problem, which he himself even found it impossible to solve.

"But, psha," he suddenly exclaimed, after ruminating for some time, "what a fool am I to give way to this worse than childish weakness, to encourage such gloomy and bewildering thoughts as these, when they can do no good but to vex and torture me? I and the world have long been at war with each other, and it is not by tamely yielding like a craven dog, that I can hope to better my condition. I have lived to be a villain, and now can only be a villain to live. I am plunged too deep in the gulf of crime to extricate myself if I would, and the cant and humbug of penitence will not procure me forgiveness, secure me a friend, or purchase me a meal. The poor look upon me with disgust, the rich despise me, would refuse to relieve me with a shilling, even though they saw me famishing of want before them, and therefore I at every opportunity must compel them to contribute to my wants. 'Tis no use whining—'tis no use regretting, my dye is cast, and all that I can do is to make the best of it, and become callous, reckless, and indifferent to consequences."

His spirits revived as he made use of these guilty observations, and every spark of proper feeling was extinguished in his breast. He thought over the plot suggested by Sam Filcher, and the longer he did so, the more confident did he become of its success, and the more sanguine were his expectations as to the booty it would produce them."

"It is a capital idea," he said, "and I wonder it did not occur to me before it did to Sam. His lordship rejected my propositions at our late interview, with scorn, insulted, threatened me, and this burglary will be nothing more than a just retaliation. Besides he has a superfluity of wealth, I am steeped in poverty, so he must, though much against his will, contribute something to the necessities of him whom he once condescended to honour with his intimacy and friendship. Let me, therefore, have no further misgivings or compunctious feelings, but be firm, and success awaits me."

Having thus worked himself into this happy humour, and tired of thinking, the guilty Beaufort, resolving that no further delay in putting the nefarious design into execution should take place than was possible, also retired to bed, and like his amiable associate, Mr. Sam Filcher, almost immediately went to sleep, and slept soundly.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE BURGLARY.

Three days elapsed, and Beaufort and

Sam Filcher, having lost no time in making their arrangements for the burglary, with the greatest prospect of success, fixed the following night for the completion of their guilty design.

They had been careful not to drop the slightest hint to their associates as to their intentions, the only one whom they had been compelled to take into their plot, being the hackney coachman—with whom they had long been acquainted, and whom they could trust, he having been frequently engaged in similar infamous jobs—in order that he might be waiting with his vehicle, at a convenient spot, near the mansion, to receive the stolen property, if they obtained any, together with themselves, and convey them to a place of safety.

Sam Filcher, who was a much older adept in those sort of matters than Beaufort, had not only procured a goodly supply of pick-lock keys, but had daily taken a minute survey of the exterior of the premises, and by that means had arrived at the conclusion that an entrance might be effected without much difficulty.

As the time approached, Beaufort's anxiety, not unmingled with certain doubts, apprehensions, misgivings, and qualous of conscience, momentarily increased, while the confidence of Sam Filcher, and his eagerness for the performance of what he characteristically called "regular business," kept pace with the varied emotions of his less daring and reckless colleague.

In order the better not to excite the suspicions of their companions at the den, they left the house, after having disguised themselves in the best manner they could, in the afternoon, and making their way towards the west-end of the town, and not far from the scene of the intended burglary, settled themselves quietly down in the tap-room of an obscure old fashioned public-house, where they were unknown, to await the arrival of night.

Sam Filcher drank with caution for he knew that the more active and dangerous part of the "business" would devolve upon him, but he plied his companion liberally with spirits, and other exciting drinks, in order to keep up his resolution, and to drown those fears and misgivings which might otherwise have prompted him to abandon the designs at the eleventh hour.

And Beaufort was by no means backward in receiving these stimulatives, for he still, in spite of his endeavours to conceal his real thoughts from the keen penetration of the "Sprig of Myrtle," at times felt uneasy and wavering, and at length by the aid of these frequent potations, he managed to get his courage up to what he considered and hoped to be the sticking point, and eleven o'clock

having struck from a neighbouring church clock, and the old watchman—who had been enjoying a comfortable hour-and-a-half's "forty winks" in his box—having duly proclaimed the same to be "half-past one, and a cloudy morning"—Beaufort and Sam Filcher sallied forth from the public-house, on their nefarious expedition, and stealthily made their way by back streets, and through low and obscure courts and alleys, towards the scene of action.

The night was one of those which seem to approve and to favour such guilty designs, for it was pitch dark, with a foggy, unwholesome atmosphere, the moon had never once glanced forth from behind the black and misty clouds that hung upon the sky, and there was not a star to be seen.

The only lights that at all disturbed this almost impenetrable gloom, were the miserable oil lamps which in those days illuminated—if we may make use of the anachronism—the streets of London, those glimmering in the dusky windows of some low coffee-house, or tavern, and that occasionally emitted by the large, clumsy lantern of some dozy watchman, as he slowly went his round, miscalling the hour, and these only served to make "darkness visible."

There were but few persons in the streets except "unfortunate women," some wretched, starving, shelterless wanderer—seeking the dark vaults of the Adelphi, or the Piazza's of Covent Garden, to take their nightly rest, and hoping to wake no more to misery and hunger—or drunken swells, and blackguard tap-room loungers, staggering towards their dwellings, and making the air resound with their hideous noises, liberally embellishing the same with all the oaths and obscenities to be found in the ruffian's vocabulary.

Hackney coaches and gentleman's carriages were clattering along from the "Uprore"—as Sam Filcher called it—and the different places of amusement, and altogether there was sufficient noise in the streets at that should be silent hour to prevent any moderately not somniferous person from going to sleep.

"'Tis a fine night for our business," whispered Sam, as they proceeded; "how do yer feel now, captain?"

"Firm and confident, Sam," replied Beaufort, who felt the intoxicating drink, of which he had so freely partaken glowing within him, exciting his brain, and imparting to him an artificial courage, which, however, would not fail to evaporate with the fumes of the spirit.

"All right, guvner," said Sam, approvingly "only you keep in that here same 'appy state of mind, and good luck and success is sure to attend us. We shall soon be there, and then if all's in readiness, on to business."

"You will remember the caution I gave you, Filcher," observed Beaufort, half doubtfully; "there must be no bloodshed."

"Well, and there's no 'casion to be," returned Sam, rather impatiently, "that is, if there's no interruption or resistance, if there is, and people will be obstinate, why then it can't be helped."

"I tell you," said Beaufort, sternly and peremptorily, "there must be no bloodshed, under any circumstances whatever."

"Well, well, be it so," sullenly and evasively replied Sam, "all right guvner, don't alarm yourself. Keep up your pluck as well as you can, and stick by me."

"I do not need your advice," returned Beaufort scornfully, and somewhat chafed at having his courage called into question by one of whom he still considered himself so far the superior.

"Oh, very well, captain," coolly answered Filcher, "I'm agreeable to anything, so long as its not disappointment in the bus'ness we're going upon. Hold hard we're getting near the place where Jarvey Bob, promised to meet us."

They quickened their speed till they arrived at a dark gateway, in the Haymarket, into which they both anxiously looked.

"He's not here, damn him," said Filcher, angrily; "he's full ten minutes past his time, and that's not b'sness. I wouldn't give a curse for a feller as isn't punctual. Hows'ever, something has detained him, I dare say, he's sure not to disap'ont."

"I hope he will not deceive us," said Beaufort, who began to feel his courage and confidence on the wane.

"Deceive us, Jarvey Bob, in whose way I have thrown many a profitable piece of b'sness, deceive us," replied Sam, "I should like to catch him at it. But hark I hear the approaching rumbling of coach wheels, let's stand aside, guvner, I shouldn't wonder but its him."

They drew themselves back into the darkness, that they might not be observed by any one passing, and listened impatiently to the sound of the vehicle, which quickly approached nearer.

Presently might be dimly seen through the fog that now prevailed, the dark outlines of a hackney coach, coming along the Haymarket, towards the spot where the worthy Sam Filcher and his companion were standing, and soon afterwards it arrived sufficiently near for them to distinguish it more clearly.

"All right," observed Sam, "'tis him, he's here at last."

The vehicle was now driven up to the gateway, and Beaufort and Sam Filcher came forward and revealed themselves, and Jarvey Bob, as he was familiarly called, having dismounted from his box, drew the coach up

the gateway, and then addressed himself to Sam and Beaufort, making an ample and satisfactory apology for his delay in coming.

Jarvey Bob was one of the old school of hackney coachmen—now many years extinct and superseded by “Cabby”—who were not over particular as to what they did “to yarn a honest crust,” and whose services were almost indispensable to the thieves and “cracksmen,” in cases of burglary.

He was a red nosed, mottled-cheek, knowing-looking, round shouldered man, whose body was enveloped in sundry coats, and a large, patched drab top one with innumerable capes, well adapted to resist the weather, but which seemed too heavy by half, for any man of moderate strength to bear the burthen of, even when seated on a coach-box.

He wore a mis-shapen, nondescript hat, with an enormous wide brim, and encircled by a small bayband, to shield his head from the rain, and a couple of handkerchiefs, and a large blue spotted white scarf entwined his neck, and completed his interesting personal appearance.

Beaufort and Sam Filcher having exchanged some words with this worthy, and made with him the necessary arrangements to be in readiness to receive them immediately after the burglary, cautiously made their way towards the mansion of Lord Selborne in St. James's Square.

All the houses in the square were dark and silent—the inmates, probably, having retired to bed—except that of Lord Selborne, in the kitchen, and one or two of the apartments of which might be seen lights, and, as Sam Filcher and his companion stealthily approached it through the fog, followed at a short distance by Jarvey Bob, and the coach the sounds of music, the shuffling of feet, and merry laughter at intervals, saluted their ears, and Beaufort drew back in confusion and disappointment.

“What's the meaning of this?” he whispered to Sam.

“Oh,” replied the latter, “I dare say its only the servants having a bit of a *swarry* and ball. It's very natural you know that they should like to enjoy themselves at master or mistress's expense when they are out of town.”

“Curse them,” said Beaufort, angrily, “their festivities might as well have been put off to some other night, they will baulk us in our designs.”

“Not a bit of it,” returned Sam, “on the *contrary*, they may further our plans. They will perhaps break up soon, so let us stand by in this doorway, and watch and wait patiently.”

Beaufort felt far from satisfied, but he agreed to the proposal of Sam Filcher, and as there was no one to observe them, having

given instructions to Jarvey Bob to keep moving about with his vehicle, but not lose sight of them or the house, they drew themselves up in the doorway adjoining the house of Lord Selborne, and where they could watch all that passed.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE PROGRESS OF THE PLOT.

There were no persons passing or re-passing in the square, nothing whatever disturbed its profound quiet, save the sounds of merriment from the mansion of Lord Selborne; the old watchman—excellent guardian of the peace, and looker after midnight robbers and assassins, as a faithful and trustworthy watchman, who had, for the time being, the property, as well, probably, as the lives of the inhabitants of his “beat” in his keeping, ought to be—was sound asleep in his box, so that nothing could be more favourable for the successful operation of the villainous design which Beaufort and Sam Filcher had in contemplation, and were waiting to accomplish.

“The party,” said Beaufort, whose patience was becoming exhausted, and who feared that if they had to wait much longer his courage and resolution might fail him; “the party does not seem disposed to abandon their sports just yet, and I am afraid we shall not stand much of a chance of putting our designs into effect to night. I'm tired of waiting, damn them.”

“Take it coolly, captain,” replied the immovable Sam; “all in good time, they must have pretty good bellows, and no mistake, if they are able to continue these capers much longer. But come, supposing as we take a survey of the back part of the premises, as you've described them to me. Who knows but that in their thoughtlessness and carelessness, while thus enjoying themselves, they may have left the door or lower window open, by which we may enter the house without any farther trouble?”

“Ah,” exclaimed Beaufort, approvingly, “a capital thought, and not an improbable one. Come, Sam.”

“All right, captain,” replied the latter, “I'm ripe and ready for mischief, up to my work. I've got a bag in my coat pocket, to receive any stray plate or any other trifles that we may meet with in our way, so come along, captain, be a pluck'd un.”

“Now's the time, and now's the 'our,
See the front of—”

“Silence, fool!” interrupted Beaufort, fearfully; “this is neither the time or the

place for your damned noise of singing, as I suppose you call it. Is this your sagacity and caution? You are going a fair way to betray us."

"All right, captain," said Sam, "perhaps I was wrong in a givin' a went to my feelin's so loud, but I won't do so again. Asides, its ov no use a bein' down hearted over th' b'sness, and should any von have ovetheerd my stave, they'll only take it to be some 'tosticated purfeshnul gentleman on his vay home to his virtuous snoozin' ken. No harm done, guvner, come along; 'Now's the time, and now's—' hold hard, Sam, 'twan't do to come it too stiff."

Thus saying, the facetious gentleman, with great difficulty quelling the exuberance of his mirth, led the way to the back of the house, followed by Beaufort who was in a state of considerable doubt and anxiety.

The merriment in the house, continued with unabated spirit, and the happy party did not appear at all inclined to separate, for the present, at any rate, but resolved to enjoy themselves to the top of their bent.

It was the anniversary of the birth of one of the female servants, so as there was no one to control them or to raise any objection, his lordship being out of town, and there being an abundance of everything in his princely and hospitable mansion, his domestic considered it nothing but fair and right that they should do full honour to the auspicious occasion and to send round invitations to as many of their friends and acquaintances as chose to accept them, to enjoy themselves in Selborne House, at a grand banquet, and ball in the evening.

All the arrangements for this cheap entertainment, borrowed, without permission, from Lord Selborne, were complete, and made and carried into operation with great taste and spirit. At the banquet there was every delicacy and luxury in season, placed upon the table in a style, of which his lordship himself need not to have felt ashamed, and all the details of the entertainment were characterised by the same taste and liberality, on the principle that it is no very difficult or unpleasant task to be hospitable and generous with other people's property.

The wines were of the finest vintage that his lordship's well-stocked cellar could supply, and the dessert was unexceptionable.

To conduct the ball in the evening an efficient M.C., and a small but excellent band of musicians were specially engaged, and it is but doing justice to most of the gay terpsichoreans to say that they acquitted themselves in a manner which would not have disgraced many of the fashionable frequenter of the Almacks of that day.

But to return to Beaufort and Sam Filcher.

As has been before stated, they walked round to the back of the premises, and after briefly but carefully reconnoitring, their most sanguine hopes and wishes were gratified, for, trying one of the lower windows, they found that the servants had neglected to fasten it on the inside, so that all obstructions to their ingress were removed.

"Right again, by Jew-peter," cried Sam Filcher, in high glee, and with a look of the utmost satisfaction, "here's a lucky go, captain, fortin smiles upon us vith her most radiant smiles, as that here himortal bard of Seven Dials, says; so now whilst our friends of the area-stocracy is a enjoying themselves ve can quietly help ourselves to some of the good things contained in their noble master's plate chest, or any loose cash as ve may tumble over."

"Hush," said Beaufort, in a whisper, "we must not forget caution. Did you bring the dark lantern?"

"Wot the bull's eye?" said Sam, in the same low tone, "in course I did, and some phosphorous in a small bottle, and some matches. Here they are; I've always got my eye to business. How do you feel now, guvner—game to the back bone, eh?"

"Ask no questions," replied Beaufort, sternly, "but see to your own courage. Light the lantern, for it is impossible for us to grope our way about in the dark, with any effect."

"All right, captain," returned the cool and amiable tempered Mr. Filcher, "don't put yourself in a passion. Ve shall be up to our work in a minute."

He quickly lighted the lantern, and then cautiously and silently raising the window, gazed eagerly into the apartment upon which it opened.

It was a small room appropriated to the storage of miscellaneous articles of lumber, and which Beaufort knew to be connected by a short passage beyond with the building. The door on the opposite side of the room was closed, but the key was in the lock on the inside, which convinced them that it was not fastened; in fact, everything so far appeared to favour the infamous designs of the burglars, and the villain Beaufort felt increased courage, whilst his hardened and reckless companion was in the highest possible state of satisfaction and sanguine expectation.

"Right as a trevit, captain," he whispered as he threw his leg over the windowsill, and silently stepped into the room, "come on, now's the time or never."

Beaufort having first looked cautiously behind them to see that they were not watched by any one, quickly followed Sam into the room, and closing the window after them, and fastening it on the inside, to pre-

vent suspicion and guard against danger, should any one approach, stood for a moment or two to collect his thoughts ere they proceeded further in the lawless and nefarious business.

"All right, captain," again whispered Sam, "we've made an entrance any how, and its strange to me if we go away without an errand."

"Be not too fast, Sam," said Beaufort, "or it may spoil everything. Above all, do not forget my injunctions, should we be surprised and interrupted, we must, while we take care to insure our own escape have every respect for human life."

"Psha," returned Sam, testily and impatiently, "wot 'casion is there for so many warnings? I knows my b'sness, and don't want not no hinstructions. But it's no use standing pattering here, there's not no time for delay, wotsomdever, so let's be a makin' of hay while the sun shines."

Beaufort returned no answer, but following Sam Filcher on tip-toe to the room-door, the latter opened it, and throwing the light of the lantern full upon the short narrow passage upon which it opened, gazed along it, and both stopped to listen attentively.

The strains of music, and the sounds of the merry dance from the servants and their guests reached their ears, and seemed to be maintained with unabated spirit.

"They're still at it, captain," remarked Sam, with a satisfied look, "and they make too much noise to hear us. Nothing could be more fort'nate. Good luck to 'em, I say. Now, before they disturb themselves from their amusement, to commence operashuns on the quiet."

He entered the passage as he spoke, accompanied by Beaufort, and took the precaution of removing the key out of the lock, closing the door and securing it on the outside.

"There," he observed, "that's well done; now no one can be up to our b'sness, and down upon us, without giving us fair warning. Which is our way to the upper regions, guvner? for you know all about it."

"We must get to the front hall, through that door yonder," replied Beaufort, "and ascend the grand staircase to gain the principal apartments, where we are likely to find what we seek. But first let us put on our masks."

This was done.

"Now, quick's the word, and quick's the motion," remarked Filcher, advancing towards the door.

"Caution, caution," urged Beaufort.

They tried the door, but it was fast.

"This is awkward, said Sam, "and the first baulk we have received. Never mind, my picklock keys, one of 'em will do the job

I dare say, so here goes to try, and not no mistake."

"Should this door be bolted on the outside," remarked Beaufort, "as it is very likely to be, we are foiled altogether."

"Well," returned Sam, "we shan't know that till we try. It's no use meeting troubles half way."

He proceeded to practice upon the lock, when Beaufort suddenly stopped him, and whispered in his ear.

"Hold, Filcher, do you not hear persons in the hall?"

"Yes, now I do," replied Sam, in the same cautious, low tone, "'tis the party that have broken up, I dare say, and are a wishing each other good night. They'll soon be off, and then the other servants will retire to bed, worn out I should think with capering about like mad, for so many hours, and we can go quietly about our work without any fear of interruption."

The observations they overheard between the servants and their guests in the hall, confirmed Sam's opinions, and they waited patiently the departure of the latter, which, however, after many friendly farewells and good night's, on both sides, at length took place, and the servants then appeared to return to the apartment in which they had held the principal portion of their festivities, and silence ensued.

Filcher now resumed his operations on the lock, and after a short time he succeeded, without making much noise, and the door yielded, thus proving most satisfactorily that the fears expressed by Beaufort, namely that the door was bolted on the outside, were unfounded.

"Well," observed Sam, "that here job's done in wot I calls true purfeshnul style, an' not no mistake. The coast is now clear, all's silent in the house, and so there's nothing to perwent us going to work at once. This way, captain, I'll take the lead, cos I alwus likes to be first to face danger, if there should happen to be any. Round the corner, and up the grand staircase. Visit the butler's room first, out of regard to the plate. Mustn't miss a single chance while we're about it. This way, captain—steady steady."

All this was spoken in little more than a whisper, and Sam placing one hand on the wrist of Beaufort, and holding up the lantern above his head with the other to light them on their way, they proceed with breathless caution towards the staircase, and which they had just began to ascend, when a noise from below, as of the servants about to hasten up the stairs from the kitchen, doubtless for the purpose of retiring to their different chambers, startled and alarmed them, and Sam hastily drawing the shade across the lantern, to conceal the light, they both

quickly but silently retraced their steps to the room they had first entered, and awaited the result with the utmost anxiety and impatience.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE MURDER.

"Another delay," murmured Sam, sullenly, "curse it, we shall never get to business, it seems."

"Silence!" enjoined the half daunted Beaufort, in a low tone, "your garrulous tongue will betray us after all, if you don't mind what you are about. Hush! listen!"

Filcher obeyed, and they then heard the servants ascending the staircase, then an indistinct murmuring of several voices, followed by the closing of doors above, and all was again silent as the grave, and Beaufort breathed again.

"That's lucky," remarked Sam, "they've retired at last, and now I suppose we may venture to commence operations, without fear of any further interruption. Come, captain, we must make a bold rush now, and polish off the business like a flash of lightning."

"Stop," commanded Beaufort, holding him back; "don't be in such a hurry."

"What's the matter now?"

"The danger may not yet be over; they have hardly had time to retire to bed yet, we must wait a little longer ere we venture."

"Psha!" returned Sam, petulantly, "this is nonsense; I'm getting impatient."

"All in good time," remarked Beaufort, with more coolness than he had hitherto displayed, "it won't do to be too rash."

Sam growled an ugly oath, and very reluctantly submitted, and they then both walked to the foot of the staircase, and listened for some time attentively, but not the least sound meeting their ears, Filcher, whose patience was quite exhausted, began to ascend on tiptoe, and Beaufort rather timidly followed, having first whispered to the former some instructions as to the room it would be advisable for them to visit first, which was Lord Selborne's sitting-room.

They listened for a moment or two at the doors of the different rooms, which Beaufort pointed out as the sleeping apartments of the servants, and being convinced from the sound of their heavy breathing that they were all fast asleep, they proceeded on their lawless errand with more confidence.

Having traversed a circular gallery that run round the top of the second principal flight of stairs, and upon which several of the best apartments opened, they stopped at the door of Lord Selborne's sitting room,

which they found to be locked, and the key not there, so that Sam Filcher was again compelled to call his "perfeshnui" talent to his assistance, grumbling curses on this additional delay all the time.

This was a patient lock, so that it must cost a considerable deal more time and patience to pick it than the other had done, and neither of which could Sam willingly spare to bestow upon it, but at length it gave way, and the two villains found themselves standing in the elegant apartment, furnished in so chaste and *recherche* a style, and seeming at a glance to present the certainty of a valuable booty.

"His lordship is a nobleman of great taste," remarked Sam Filcher, with a sinister grin, as he surveyed the handsome room, with a 'perfeshnui' eye, "and in course, I admire him for it, though I question much whether he would consider our visit to this apartment, if he knewed it, either welcome or agreeable, 'specially at this rayther unreasonable hour."

"Hold your tongue, fool," said Beaufort, impatiently, "and see to business, this is neither the time nor place for idle nonsense, and there has been much delay already. Jarvey Bob will begin to feel uneasy, and perhaps make an abrupt departure for fear of unpleasant consequences, and then we should be placed in a most dangerous dilemma, from which we might find it difficult to extricate ourselves."

"Well, that's true enough, anyhow," coincided Sam, "but still I knows old Bob too well to believe as how he would act in so shabby a manner, 'specially towards an old pal and pertikler. But come, captain, I'm ready, but you must lend us a helping hand, for you knows best where his lordship keeps his valuables, for I don't s'pose as they travels with him."

Beaufort returned no answer, and they both quickly set to work in right good earnest.

A bunch of keys which opened the different drawers was found, and the latter were speedily and greedily ransacked by Beaufort and his rapacious companion, and everything of value that they contained, taken from them and consigned to the bag which Sam Filcher had brought with him, several rings, watches, and other costly articles of jewellery were hurriedly, but carefully deposited in their pockets, and having secured everything that was portable or worth taking, they were satisfied with the proceeds of this room, and quitting it without the slightest noise, they next made their way towards the butler's room, in which Beaufort well knew the plate-chest had been always deposited, and in which room he (the butler) also slept.

This was the most dangerous part of the



guilty business, for they expected to find that faithful and trustworthy domestic in the chamber, and in bed, and if he should happen to awake before they had secured what they wanted, he would be sure to raise an alarm, and it might be difficult for them to make their escape.

Besides, Beaufort knew that the butler never went to bed without having loaded pistols handy, and it would be necessary to secure them to prevent him from doing his chief.

And now, too, all those fears and dismal forebodings which had haunted his mind, on the murderous hints thrown out by the villain Filcher, again rushed upon him, and with tenfold force; he would himself gladly have abandoned all further guilty proceedings, being fully satisfied with the booty they

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had already obtained, such was his dread of that which was likely yet to take place.

He looked appealingly to Sam, but finding that that desperate and determined ruffian was eyeing him with an expression of the utmost contempt, and even of malice, seeming to penetrate his inmost thoughts, his agitation increased, and he shuddered.

Sam Filcher continued for a moment or two to gaze earnestly at him in this manner, without offering to speak, then grasping him rather fiercely by the wrist, and looking at him more sternly, even savagely, than it might have been supposed a gentleman of his facetious disposition could possibly have done, in a hoarse tone, which showed plainly that what he then said he most undoubtedly meant, he muttered in his ear—

“Damned cur, you’re funkin’ ag’in, air

you? I'd advise you to mind what you're about, or I might chance on this here 'casion to have no pertikler respect for persons. You understand me, don't you? and I mean it, too."

"Sam, Sam," said Beaufort, with a look of supplication, and in the same whispering tone, "let us proceed no further in this business, or harm will come of it. We have already got sufficient booty, be satisfied, and let us retreat, while we can do so in safety."

"Fool!" returned Filcher, with the same stern and contemptuous look, "do yer s'pose I'm goin' without my full svag? Do yer think I'm a goin' without a hinspectin' the plate? Couldn't do sich a thing, on not no account wotsomdever. Come on, I say, and no flinching, or—"

He did not finish the sentence, but the terrible look he fixed upon Beaufort fully explained it, and that now trembling guilty man could scarcely forbear a groan of agony and despair.

Sam Filcher waited for no more observations, but still retaining his hold of Beaufort's wrist, and having first listened for an instant, and finding all still within the room he silently and cautiously tried the door.

It was unlocked, and gently opening it, and without the slightest noise whatever, he peeped into the room, and then beheld the faithful old butler—who had been in the service of Lord Selborne, and that of his late father, for many years—in bed, and sleeping calmly and soundly.

Beaufort beheld him at the same time, and he shuddered.

"All right," whispered Sam, "he's fast enough; there's the chest, and now for it."

He drew the trembling Beaufort into the room as he spoke, and then relinquishing his hold of his wrist, he stood for a minute and gazed earnestly at the iron chest, which contained the family plate, with an anxious and greedy eye.

Beaufort kept his eyes fixed upon the sleeping man, and he had never felt so truly conscience-stricken and wretched as he did at that moment.

He looked for the pistols, but could not see them, and his alarm increased; but he was afraid to mention anything to Sam about them, and his fears and anxiety increased to an almost insupportable degree.

Sam Filcher, however, was "on to b'sness," as he always characteristically expressed it, and quietly placing his bag—already containing so much valuable property—on the floor, and having again fixed a hasty but eager glance upon the butler, he once more took out his lock-picking tools, and kneeling down before the chest, commenced endeavouring to force it open, while the unhappy Beaufort stood trembling by, half inclined

to retreat, but powerless motionless as a statue.

Sam found that he had indeed his "work" to do with the chest, and as one attempt after the other failed to open it, he muttered the most terrible oaths to himself, and became otherwise greatly excited.

At length, however, he did succeed in accomplishing his task, the lock yielded, he eagerly raised the lid of the chest, and gazed with greedy eyes upon its valuable contents.

An exclamation from Beaufort startled him at the very moment when he was about to commence the work of plunder, and turning hastily round, he beheld the butler sitting upright in the bed, and gazing earnestly at him; while the villain Beaufort seemed to be perfectly transfixed to the spot on which he was standing, and unable to act either one way or the other.

Filcher, however, acted promptly, and as the unfortunate man was feeling about for his pistols, which he usually had handy to the bed, he rushed upon him, and grasping him by the throat, seized one of the deadly weapons, which was accidentally discharged without wounding the butler; but before Beaufort could interfere, the ruffian dealt him a frightful blow on the head with the pistol, which he repeated, and with one fearful groan, his hapless victim sunk back upon the bed a corpse.

Beaufort was horror-struck. His worst fears and forebodings were thus realised, and he gazed appalled at the murderer, who, however, looked on the inhuman work of his hands with as much cool indifference as if it had been a mere matter of business.

"Wretch! monster!" said the terrified and disgusted Beaufort, "what have your accursed hands done?"

"Why," replied the miscreant, in the same reckless tones as he was accustomed to use, "it very much resembles a settled case I think."

"Villain!" said Beaufort, "you have committed murder—foul; inhuman murder, and—"

"Bah," interrupted Filcher, impatiently; "I want no preaching; it's done, and it can't be undone. 'Twas his own fault; why did he wake up afore ye had done our business and got away? Ah, what noise is that?"

"Why what can you expect it to be?" replied Beaufort; "the report of the pistol has aroused and alarmed the other servants, and we shall be detected all through your rash folly."

"Hold hard, captain," said Sam, deliberately, "don't meet troubles half way. If they are too quick upon us, why we must fight for it, damn them; they've spoilt us of the plate."

He hastily picked up the bag as he spoke,

and taking the other pistol which he found near the bedside, he rushed from the room, and down the stairs, closely followed by Beaufort, whose terror may be imagined.

They had, however, no other means of escaping than by acting with determination. The servants were rushing from different parts of the house, and threatened to obstruct their further progress, when they were compelled to fight desperately, and at length forced their way to the street, hurrying through the fog to where Jarvey Bob was anxiously and impatiently awaiting them, surprised at their long absence, and being half inclined to study his own safety, and take his departure.

There was, of course, not an instant to be lost, the servants following closely in pursuit, and raising a loud alarm, which was likely to arouse the sleeping watchmen, and bring them and others to their assistance; the coach-door was quickly opened, the bag and its contents tossed into it, and the two villains followed, and before the domestics could recover themselves from their surprise, it was driven out of sight, much to their confusion and disappointment.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE TORTURES OF REMORSE.

The two burglars had previously given instructions, in case of their being pressed, to Bob, where to drive them, which was his own house at the east end of the town, and where he considered they would be in greater safety, and might conceal their booty until they had an opportunity of otherwise disposing of it.

As the vehicle rattled quickly on the way, the thoughts of Beaufort were busily occupied with the dreadful crime which the hardened miscreant Filcher had perpetrated, and he shuddered with increased horror as he reflected upon it; but the murderer appeared to exult at the hideous deed, and behaved with perfect coolness and indifference.

"We shall manage to elude them, after all," he said; "but I say, captain, it's cursed provoking that we should have been interrupted before half completing the business; and if that old butler had been wise, he would have continued to gammon himself asleep, and then he might have saved his life. But if people will be foolish, they must take the consequences."

"Hardened villain," cried the disgusted Beaufort, "a terrible retribution will assuredly overtake this dreadful crime."

"Psha," cried the ruffian, "your down on your luck in a minute. Howsomdever, we

must take our chance, and make the best on it. I didn't want to kill the poor devil, but he shouldn't have put himself in my way. There don't be alarmed, we arn't grabbed yet."

"We both deserve to be, and to perish by the hands of the hangman," replied Beaufort, in a voice, and with a look of agony and horror, which, however, made no other impression, or at least, that he evinced on the consummate villain, Filcher, than by a slight twinge of his ugly features, and an uneasy movement of his fingers round his neck.

"Cut it, captain," he said in a deprecatory and remonstrative tone, "that here observation was rayther too bad, and not 'xactly becoming on you when you know my *sensibel* feelin's on that here p'int. Howsomdever, happy go lucky's my maxim; yer know we can't expect to carry on, and to have it all our own way for ever. I s'pose you and I will be under the painful necessity of takin' a partin' drop together, one ov these here fine mornin's; a *heartychoke* for breakfast, by way of a change, so we may as well make up our minds to it, an' make things pleasant an' agreeable till our time comes."

"Brute!" exclaimed Beaufort, in a passionate voice, clenching his fist, shaking it in his face, and almost exasperated to strike him. But Sam only laughed, evidently much amused at, and proud of his own coarse and disgusting wit.

"There now, guvner," he said, "what's the use of you a puttin' of yourself in a passion about such trifles? Take it coolly, and then you'll be all right. You shouldn't mind what I say, for yer knows I don't mean not no harm, an' I wouldn't not wound your feelin's for the world, only I must have my joke ven I feels in a good humour, an' that's all about it."

"Reckless, hardened villain," returned the wretched, conscience stricken Beaufort, shuddering, "can you dare to utter your filthy, your horrible jokes, with the blood of your unfortunate victim still upon your hands?"

"Vell," replied the miscreant, carelessly, and with a half grin still upon his countenance, "what's the use of crying about it, I should like to know? That won't bring the old chap to life ag'in. Howsomdever, as you don't seem to like my talk on that here subject, I'll shut up, an' talk about something else."

Beaufort returned no answer to this, for he saw that it was completely useless to do so, and the horror and remorse of his own thoughts and feelings held his tongue, and rendered him more truly wretched than he had ever been before.

He threw himself back in the vehicle, covered his face with his hands to shut out

the sight of the hardened and remorseless Sam Filcher—whom he could not now behold without feelings of the utmost repugnance and horror—and abandoned himself to all those fearful thoughts that rushed so tumultuously on his distracted brain.

What would he not have given could he but have recalled that fearful night's proceedings—if he had never listened to the guilty proposal of Sam Filcher to commit the burglary, especially after the dreadful fears and forebodings that had beset his mind? But useless now was all repentance, and that thought increased the agony of his feelings.

While the wretched Beaufort was thus occupied, Filcher was examining the contents of the bag, which he did with the eye of a connoisseur, whistling with much self-satisfaction all the time.

But at length he turned his attention once more to Beaufort, and in his usual manner observed—

"Come, I say, captain, cheer up; never say die till your dead; I don't like to see you so down on your luck; it'll be all right, never fear, and ve shall hear nothing more about the b'sness, for it was b'sness, arter all, though we might as well have had a better swag."

"Cease, murderer," commanded Beaufort, hoarsely, "the very tones of your voice now fill me with disgust and horror."

"Come, I say, captain," returned Sam, trying to look indignant, but accomplishing the task very badly, "that here's rather too much of the monkey, I think. Do yer want to insult me? Howsomdever, I'm too much of the gentleman to quarrel with yer, so let that pass. Ve haven't got such a bad booty arter all, so that ought to console yer. See here."

"Keep it from my sight," said Beaufort, with a ghastly look, and trembling more violently than ever, "I must not, dare not look upon it. Every article of that accursed ill-gotten booty would seem to my appalled sight to be stained with human blood."

"Gammon, I knows better than that; why, there's not a mark upon the plate, and it does one's eyes good to look on it. It's polished so bright, I could see to shave myself in it. They know'd we was coming for it, so they got it ready for us, I s'pose."

"No more," cried Beaufort, in hoarse and commanding accents, "seek not to excite me too much, or it may be worse for you. I will no longer listen to you; leave me to my own thoughts."

"Vell," coolly replied the ruffian, "as yer like, and the rest in ha'pence. You're a rum fellow, captain, there's not no pleasing of you any how, so I may as well hold my red rag. I dare say now, as your so offended

at it, you von't think of takin' your share of the booty; in course you von't; wouldn't do sich a thing for the world, gammon an' all. Howsomdever, I can't make not nothing of you, so I'll leave you alone in your glory, as that here chap Shikspur ses."

Having thus pleasantly delivered himself, Sam Filcher turned away from his wretched colleague with a look of the most supreme contempt, and commenced singing one of his favourite flash ditties, in high glee.

Again did Beaufort abandon himself to the fearful and torturing thoughts that haunted his wretched and bewildered mind, and every moment the bitter anguish of his remorse became the more insupportable; even the noisy singing of the incorrigible Sam Filcher was unheard by him.

The ghastly features of the murdered man to his affrighted imagination was still present to his eyes, and all the horrors that occurred in that fatal chamber of death, were re-enacted. He could almost imagine that he heard his last dying groan, and saw the blood as it flowed from the gaping wound inflicted by the murderous hand of Sam; in fact, he was worked up to such a dreadful pitch of excitement that he was almost driven to madness, and scarcely knew where he was, or what he was about.

He was at length aroused by the stopping of the coach before the door of Jarvey Bob's domicile, which was situated in one of the lowest back slums at the east end of London, and the worthy jehu dismounted from his box.

Now then, captain," said Sam, slapping him in a familiar and friendly manner on the shoulder, "wake up; here ve are at last, all safe an' sound, and ve arn't not hornimented with the darbies yet. They must get up rayther early in the morning to catch us, I reckon, 'cept you're a goin' for to go to make a fool of yourself. Now then, Bob, look about yer, my toolup, an' get that here blessed door open, an' jist show us a light, if it's only by that preshush fiery nose o' yourn, then I'll conway the svag into the crib."

"All right, old fellow," replied Bob, "I'm with yer like a flash of lightning; but I say, Mister Sam, don't you go for to make a light of my nose, if yer please, or I might happen to ride rusty, and to kick over the traces. I doesn't not like nuffin pers'nal."

"In course yer doesn't," returned the facetious villain Filcher, "no gen'lman as is a gen'lman does, and you're a heavy swell, top coat, capes an' all. I offers yer ev'ry han'som' apology. There now, trot on."

Bob did "trot on," and Sam Filcher followed him quickly into the house, with the bag, the door having been opened while this little colloquy was going on, by a little old woman, very dirty, very ugly, and a most

decided stranger and enemy to every amiable quality.

This was Jarvey Bob's better half, or rather three quarters, for Bob contented himself with a fourth of man's usual prerogatives, yielding—as every good and affectionate husband ought to do—to Mrs. Jarvey Bob an undisputed monopoly of the other parts of himself.

While Bob and Sam Filcher were thus amicably settling their little differences, Beaufort as soon as he saw the door open, had quitted the coach, and snatching the lamp out of the old woman's hand, rushed unceremoniously into a small dark, dirty room at the back of the house, where a miserable fire turned warmth into mockery, and looked a very unwilling prisoner in the grate; and throwing himself on the ruins of a chair without a back, and placing his elbows on his knees, resting his head upon his hands gave himself up entirely to the misery of his thoughts.

This room, which was remote from the others was, Jarvey Bob's "private office," and wherein very often business of importance, and of decidedly a private nature, for it would by no means bear the light of day, was transacted.

Sam Filcher followed Bob into this apartment, and the latter closed the door, which shut with a secret spring, the amiable old lady having exchanged a growl with her lord and master—which was their usual affectionate style of greeting—and on that particular occasion, not being permitted to be a member of the council, betook herself to another "snuggery," where she sat down to quietly enjoy herself, and seek consolation for the cares and anxieties of this wicked world, over a short pipe, and a bottle of whiskey.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

"Here we air then," remarked Sam Filcher, as he tossed the bag from his shoulder on to the dirty floor—which had been a total stranger to water, or even a hair-broom, for an indefinite period—"this here crib is not quite so fine an' smart as his most grashus Majesty's throne-room, or zactly as bad as a pig-stye, howsomdever, if gen'elmen of our purfeshun vant a pretty little place to settle their private business in, why then I means to say I'll back it ag'in any 'stablishment of the sort in the 'tropolis."

"Yes," coincided Bob, "you're quite right, my flower; and, I say, there *has* been some b'sness done here, eh? Hallo!—my eyes!"

"Vot's the matter now, spooney?" demanded the complimentary, but at the same

time rather angry Sam, as Bob uttered these words, and looked at him with a mingled expression of curiosity and fear, "vot the devil are you gaping at, and extorting that here ugly mug of yours in that here way for?"

"There's blood upon your coat, Sam," replied the worthy Jarvey, querulously, and evincing marked symptoms of terror.

"Vell, I knows it," coolly replied Filcher, "it don't vant a tallscope to see that, and vot on it?"

"Sam; Sam," said Bob, seriously, and with quivering lips, "yer knows I respects yer, yer know that I'm always ready to lend a helping hand to any friend in a case of borrowin' from those who can afford it, but—but, I can't—I won't—I—Sam Filcher, you've done a bad thing—those here ugly red spots on the cuff of yer coat tell it—you've been a doin' of *murder*!"

"Yes, yes," almost shrieked Beaufort, starting from his seat at the mention of that fearful word, with his whole frame convulsed and a look of horror; "murder! 'twas his accursed hand that perpetrated the bloody and inhuman deed, not mine; but—but—we—you—I, Bob, are equally guilty in the eye of justice and the law, and—and the gallows is our certain doom."

There was a terrible pause, after Beaufort had thus delivered himself of those awful words, and the three criminals stood and gazed at each other with ghastly looks, and suspended faculties. Sam, the hardened, reckless, jocular Sam Filcher, now, for the first time, exhibited, if possible, more terror than his two guilty companions.

But it was only for a few minutes that he did so; he quickly recovered himself, and turning with a look of ferocity and savage determination upon Beaufort and Bob—particularly the former—he said, in tones that showed his desperate resolution if he was exasperated to it—

"Damned curs, vithout the pluck of a titmouse, when there's rayl b'sness to do, an' vot must be done, but are ready enough to sva'ller the fat when the sarcepan is biled over, d'yer think as old Sam Filcher, the Sprig of Myrtle, an' the pride of Vestminster, he as fit the celebrated Hookem Snivey, an' arter polishin' him off, like smoke, in not no time at all, comed out of the ring smilin'—d'yer think that the old Sam Filcher, the prig, the burglar, as was never too short to reach anything worth havin', an' had alwus the pluck to take it vithout axin' for it, is now a goin' to stand the nonsense of sich a couple of snivellin' things as you, or to be frightened into fits by yer? I have done this here b'sness, an' for why?—cos I was compelled to it, an' damn the consequences, I von't flinch from 'em. But mark me, Mr. Jarvey Bob, and you, Captain Beaufort, as

use to was, so little do I wallee my neck, that if yer excite me any more, may I never taste white satin ag'in, if I don't turn snitch on myself, and the konsikens vill be that ve shall all three dance the Old Bailey hornpipe on nuffin together. Mark me, I say—I say vot I mean, an I mean vot I ses, an' yer know as I'm a gen'lman as wouldn't break my vord on no account votsondever. Now, both on yer put that here in yer pipe an' smoke it at yer leshur."

It would be a difficult task to describe correctly the effect which these words spoken so emphatically, and with such fierce determination by the unparalleled miscreant, Sam Filcher, had upon Beaufort and Bob—the former more especially—they seemed completely paralysed, and gazed at Sam with a mingled expression of fear, remonstrance, and supplication, but without being able for some minutes to utter a word. Beaufort groaned, and covered his face with his hands, evidently suffering great mental agony.

Sam, however, stood and eyed them both with a look of the most ineffable scorn, but with one also which was sufficient to convince them that, desperate though his threats were, he was fully prepared to carry them into execution.

At length, however, he seemed to calm down a little, and in tones of expostulation, not unmingled with sarcasm, he said—

"Come, there's enough of this here foolery—vot's the use of making all this bother about nothing? It was only a haxidence arter all, an' I ain't the first von as has done the same. Call yersels pluck'd un's, I'm ashamed on yer, I blushes for yer both. Vill not nothing bring yer to yer senses?"

Beaufort fixed upon him one look of the most intense horror, groaned, and staggering to the seat, once more sunk down powerless upon it.

Bob gradually recovered from his first alarm, and knowing the determined and desperate character he had to deal with, thought it would be more prudent to adopt a conciliatory course, and therefore in expostulatory but persuasive tones he said—

"Sam, Sam, my good feller, this is a bad job; why did yer do it?"

"I've told yer," replied Filcher, impatiently, "cos I couldn't help it, so there's an end of the matter, and we'll now turn to summat much more agreeable to us all."

As he thus spoke, he took up the bag from the floor.

"Spose ve just examine the svag," he observed, "and then ve may p'raps be able to come to summat like the fair walle on it."

He prepared to turn out the contents, when Beaufort aroused by what he said, and the sound of the plate, started with wild

emotion from his seat, and grasping Sam's arm, with a look of terror and earnest supplication, he said—

"Not now, Sam, for pity's sake not now. Do not become quite insensible to every feeling. Put away that ill-gotten booty, the sight of which would excite emotions of horror in my guilty breast that I could not endure. Hear me, feel for me—I humble myself to implore you to do so."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sam Filcher, scornfully, yet without any of his former anger, "did ever any von see such a karacter? If it arn't as good as a play to see an' hear him, my name's not Sam. Yell, I suppose I may as yell humour him for vonce in a vay as I'm not in no pertikler hurry. So, Bob, ve'll just put this here out of sight for the present. Now then, bear a hand, d'yer hear?"

"All right," replied Bob, who had now quite recovered himself, "I'm with yer."

They both knelt down near a certain part of the floor, and Bob having for some time pressed hard upon a spring, the boards yielded, and with the assistance of Sam he raised a secret trap, revealing a ladder to descend, and a large depository for stolen property, or a place of concealment in the event of immediate danger, beneath.

Sam descended the ladder with the bag and its valuable contents, and having deposited it in a place of safety, returned to the room again.

"There, that here job's jobbed," he remarked, "an' now, captain, I suppose you're out of yer misery. Out of sight, though not out of mind. Now, Bob, my toolup."

"Now begin," politely requested Bob.

"This is a dry piece of b'sness, an' ve all requires summat arter the hexershuns of the night," said Sam, "haven't yer got a drop of summat in the house?"

"To be sure I has," replied Bob, "some of the right sort, and we'll have it, too."

"No, no," said Beaufort, still violently agitated, "not now, I cannot drink at this early hour of the morning; suffer me to retire to another room."

"Stuff," returned Sam, "don't make a fool of yourself. A glass or two will do yer good, and drown the blues. Sail away, Bob."

Beaufort, who would have given anything to have escaped from the presence of the villain, saw it was useless to remonstrate, and therefore said no more, and Bob left the room to procure the beverage.

When he was gone Sam looked half contemptuously, half menacingly at Beaufort for a moment, and then approaching him and laying his hand upon his arm, he said—

"Now, captain, I think as how you've had a pretty good spell at this here nonsense, an' I've borne it all quietly, but it's quite

time you cut it, that's to say, if yer wishes for the onner of the further friendship of Mister Sam Filcher, Hesqueer."

"Oh, Filcher," said Beaufort, in a subdued tone, but shuddering with instinctive horror at Sam's touch, and as he gazed upon him, "are you completely dead to every feeling of humanity? Are you indeed so callous a villain as to treat with disgusting levity the dreadful crime you have committed, and which I can never more blot out from my memory? Even now methinks I behold the ghastly and distorted features of the murdered man, as they appeared in the agonies of death, and—"

"Hold yer damned tongue, vill yer," passionately interrupted Sam, and, in spite of himself, evincing some signs of a guilty conscience, "if you von't do so, vhy you'll get my monkey up, that's all about it, and then it vill be the worse for yer. The old feller's gone, and von't come back ag'in to trouble any on us never fear, so there's an end of the matter. If yer don't take my advic an' drink hearty to vake yer up out of this, vhy then yer a fool, that's all as I've got to say."

"Wretch," muttered Beaufort to himself, and not sufficiently loud for Sam to hear; and at that moment Bob re-entered the room, bringing with him an ample supply of the most intoxicating spirits, tobacco and pipes, for the accommodation and especial enjoyment of himself and his guests, and upon which Sam Filcher—seating himself by the side of Beaufort, who he was resolved should take his full share of the beverage, immediately commenced operations, Bob being no ways backward in following his worthy example.

Sam having thus introduced himself to the friendly spirit, and feeling much refreshed by so doing, with a feeling which was worthy of a far better cause, being determined that Beaufort should participate in his enjoyment, filled a bumper, and placing it before him, said—

"Now, gúvner, this here's the medsun for your complaint, and not no mistake, and the doctor ses it's to be ditto repeated every ten minutes till further notice. So toss it off, make no wry faces about it, but say you like it. Come, don't turn away from it as if it was pison; it's the stuff to kill the blue devils, and Sam Filcher has too much respect for a old pal to like to see him down upon his luck."

"Brayvo Sam," said Jarvey Bob, approvingly, "brayvo, my buttercup. Them here's jist my senimence, and no mistake. Now, Muster Beaufort, now's your time or never. Drink, my hearty, an' if you don't find yourself as merry as a grig in not no time at all, may I never mount the box of my weikel ag'in, that's all."

How annoying and repugnant were those solicitations to the wretched Beaufort, and how painful and disgusting was every word that the unexampled scoundrel, Sam Filcher and his somewhat less hardened companion Bob, said to him. Oh, how anxiously did he wish that he could escape from them, fly from them, tear himself away from himself altogether, and from the dreadful upbraidings of his guilty conscience, the dreadful thoughts that racked his brain, and drove him almost to madness.

But there was no possibility of his doing so, and Sam Filcher, who seemed to view the agony of his feelings with the most perfect indifference, contrived to urge him to drink, and in a manner, and with looks that convinced him that he would not be refused.

In a fit of desperation therefore, he seized upon the tumbler containing the intoxicating and maddening drink, and, scarcely knowing what he did, drained it almost to the dregs, while the villain Filcher watched him with a malicious look of exultation, and Jarvey Bob with one of infinite satisfaction.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sam, in high glee at the success of his designs, "that's the ticket, captain; you'll soon feel better arter that here dose, never fear; keep that game alive, and follow my virtuous hixurmpel. Now then for another fire."

"No, no, urge me not," said the unhappy Beaufort, with a look of supplication, which, however, as the reader will expect, was completely lost upon Sam, "already I feel the fumes of the accursed drink ascending to my distracted brain, and rushing like liquid fire through every vein. I will drink no more."

"Stuff," returned Sam, contemptuously, "yer must take yer medsun reg'lar, gúvner, or you'll never be restored to a perfect state of con—con—conwalyassence, doesn't they call it in the clarsicks? Now then."

The unhappy Beaufort saw too plainly that Sam was not only determined that he would not be refused, but the more repugnance and anguish he evinced, the greater was the villain's exultation; and he had no alternative, therefore, but to obey, and he abandoned himself to his fate as he did so, caring little now what he did or what became of him.

Again he drained the contents of the glass to the dregs, and again and again Sam Filcher replenished it, and forced it upon him, exchanging significant looks with his sagacious friend, Jarvey Bob, all the time.

The effect of these frequent and deep potations was soon apparent, and more than answered the most sanguine expectations and wishes of Sam.

Bob and Sam had taken good care that the doses they adminisstered to Beaufort,

should be extra strong, and the speedy effect it took, as has been before stated, afforded them the utmost satisfaction.

The conduct of the guilty Beaufort quickly became wild and reckless, as that of every poor wretch when under the exciting influence of drink. Every better feeling was drowned; conscience no more disturbed him—but he joined with hilarity in the blackguardism and brutal levity of his companions, gave expression to oaths and disgusting ribaldry as freely as they did, and continued to drink glass after glass in rapid succession, till at last his brain reeled, his bloodshot eyes seemed to burn in their sockets, the half muttered oath died away upon his lips, the gloomy room and all that it contained appeared to whirl round in fantastic giddiness, the revolting features of Sam Filcher and Jarvey Bob gradually faded from his sight, and he sunk from his chair on the floor powerless and insensible.

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE NIGHT REVEL IN THE THIEVES HAUNT.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sam, "he's a dead un at last; I thought as how you an' I could manage the b'sness for him, Bob."

"To be sure," coincided the latter worthy gentleman, "it would have been strange if we couldn't. But, I say, Sam, we must keep a strict eye upon him arter this, and not lose sight on him for a minit, or else as his conscience pricks him so sharply, he might reveal everything."

"True," said Sam, "but we wouldn't not give him no chance of doing that. Come lend us a hand to carry him to another room, where having left him alone in his glory, ve can sit down here ag'in to enjoy ourselves for a time, and talk over b'sness."

The obliging Bob agreed to this proposal, and the two ruffians having removed the neckcloth of the insensible Beaufort, to prevent suffocation, raised him from the floor, and carried him from the room, and up a broken and dirty flight of stairs, entered a miserable chamber, in which was a stump bedstead, with a straw mattress upon it, on which they laid him, and throwing a rug over him, considered that they had performed their task with the greatest care and kindness.

"There," remarked Sam, "we've done our dooty to an unfortunat feller cretur in distress, an' our own consinches vill revard us. He'll lay there as snug an' as comfortable as a bug in a rug, an' there's no fear of his vaking ag'in for a hour or two. Come along, Bob, my flower, now you and I can enjoy our-

selves as gen'lemen ought to do, and on the quiet."

To this Bob assented, and they then quitted the room, taking good care to secure the door after them, so that Beaufort could not leave without their knowledge, and returned to the den below, where having got a fresh supply of spirits, they once more sat down to enjoy themselves, and to talk over the terrible and exciting events of the previous night, Sam relating to his companion, in the most cool and business-like manner, all that had occurred in the mansion of Lord Selborne, and every particular of the cold-blooded murder of the unfortunate butler.

Jarvey Bob listened to him with the most profound attention, but at the same time, not without evincing some signs of terror, and personal alarm for the consequences that might ensue.

"It's a pity that yer couldn't help sheddin' the old feller's blood, Sam—a very great pity," he observed.

"In course it was, an' I'm sorry for it," replied Filcher, with something like a look of compunction, "but 'twas his own fault, arter all, why did he vake till arter I and the captain had done the b'sness and vos gone?"

"Vell," observed Bob, "it'ud been much better if he hadn't. I'm afeard there will be a great stir about this here affair. Vos yourn and Beaufort's features seen by any von?"

"No," answered Sam, "there vos no von to see him, and they couldn't have done so if there vos, because yer see, we was both masked. But vot's the use of frightnin' ourselves when there's no 'casion to do so? Who the devil can have any suspishun of us, if ve don't blow the gab ourselves?"

"Right," coincided Bob, "and there's not so much danger arter all, if we only keep a strict eye on the captain, and try to vake him up from his present state."

"Leave that here to me," said Sam, "and I'll warrant I'll soon cure him of his nonsense. But, I say, Bob, the sooner we get rid of the svag the better."

"Oh, vell see to that here by an' bye," answered Bob, "never fear I'll call upon old Smoucher in the course of the day, and get him to pay us a wisit. He's the man for our money, and I dare say we shall soon be able to strike a bargain with him."

"No doubt on it," observed Sam, "he is the chap to deal with, and it won't be the first time as ve have done b'sness vith him, Bob, eh?"

"I should think not," replied the latter, seeming to recal it to his memory with much pleasure and satisfaction, "ah, many's the bright guinea I've had from that here precious old lipey. But come, Sam, let's just finish this here bottle, and then ve can take a snooze for a hour or two the better."



To this Sam Filcher assented, for after the quantity which he had already taken to drink, he began to feel rather somniferous; so, after him and his companion had finished the contents of the bottle, and their pipes, Sam, quite overpowered, fell back in his chair in a state of stupefaction or sound sleep, for he snored most frightfully.

In this happy condition Bob left him, and sought his amiable partner, who having taken her customary allowance of whiskey, and smoked several pipes of tobacco, had fallen to repose on the floor, with her head in the fire-place.

It was some hours before Beaufort awoke, with fevered blood, and burning brain, and, raising himself as well as he could on the dirty mattress on which Sam Filcher and Bob had laid him, he looked eagerly around as

well as the dim obscurity of the room would permit him, wondering where he was, and with only a vague and dreamy recollection of the terrible events that had taken place.

But at length the whole fearful truth rushing upon his memory with overwhelming force, with a cry of agony he staggered from the mattress as well as he could, the most frightful thoughts and delusions taking possession of his imagination, and trying the door, and finding it fastened, he shouted aloud to be released, for he feared to be alone, with the dreadful ideas and recollections that now crowded upon his distracted brain.

But there was no notice taken of his cries, everybody in the house at that time were wrapped soundly in their drunken sleep, and terrified beyond description, threw himself on a chair, in the greatest agony.

The scene of the murder arose to his affrighted recollection as vividly as if it was again being perpetrated before his eyes, and the looks of the murdered man, as they were in his dying moments, were distinctly presented to his vivid imagination.

The fumes of the maddening drink which the miscreants Filcher and Bob had forced upon him had not yet evaporated, and all their intoxicating and distracting effects still retained their power, divested of that stupefaction which had given a temporary oblivion to thought, and no poor guilty wretch could possibly be reduced to a more abject state of mental and bodily suffering than Beaufort was at that time.

It is not at all improbable that if the fatal means had been in his possession, he would have rushed upon that dread eternity he was so ill prepared to plunge into; and every moment did but serve to increase the insupportable horror and agony of his feelings.

For more than an hour he remained in this wretched situation, and without being able to obtain the least relief to the poignant anguish of his mind, or any one coming near him. By the faint beams of the sun—which were only partially permitted to steal in at the dirty windows, most of the glass in the frames being broken, and covered with paper, or crammed with old rags—he supposed that it must now be about mid-day, and the burglary and inhuman murder were no doubt by that time causing the greatest excitement and horror among all classes of society, and vigilant officers were on the alert to detect and apprehend the atrocious criminals who had perpetrated it, so that they might be placed at the bar of justice, and receive that ignominious punishment from the outraged laws, that society demanded, and they so richly merited.

This thought, if possible, added to his terrors, and he looked in vain for hope and consolation, there were none for a guilty wretch like him.

At length he heard footsteps slowly ascending the stairs, and shortly afterwards the door was unfastened, and Sam Filcher and Jarvey Bob entered the room, both having apparently pretty well recovered from their late inebriation.

At the sight of Filcher, Beaufort could not help shuddering and evincing other symptoms of horror, but that hardened villain returned his appalled looks with one of derision, and malicious satisfaction, and Beaufort, unable to meet it, averted his gaze and could not restrain a groan of agony.

Filcher frowned, and after a brief pause, during which he was scrutinising him narrowly and contemptuously, he said in his usual disagreeable tones, and which sufficiently conveyed the meaning, or were in-

tended to do so, that his patience was almost exhausted, his merciful forbearance and amiable disposition were nearly worn out, and he was not going to stand any more nonsense.

In this manner any close observer of character might have interpreted the bearing of Filcher, and the expression of his ugly features, and the interpretation must have been admitted to be a pretty correct one.

"What the devil's the matter with yer now? Are yer going to snivel an' drivel ag'in, and make us all uncomfortable, when we're inclined to be so 'appy; cos if yer air, I just tell yer afore hand, it von't do, an' so the sooner yer cut it the better."

"Reckless villain," returned Beaufort, in tones that told unmistakably the true nature of his thoughts and feelings at the moment, "you seem to exult in the bitter agony and remorse that rack my brain to madness, and to take a fiendish delight to torture me further, but let whatever may be the consequences I will no longer submit to it. Keep the ill-gotten booty, purchased by the monstrous sacrifice of human life, the deliberate and wanton shedding of human blood; suffer me to leave you, and never more appal my sight by crossing my path."

"Leave me—cut yer old pal, the Sprig of Myrtle, ha, ha, ha!" laughed the heartless ruffian. "Walker—now I jist vant to ax yer, arter all the long time as ve has had the onner of knowing each other, if yer now begins to see anything verdant about me? Cos if yer does, the sooner yer gets a pair of double maggernefyin' barnacles for them here preshus hopticks o' yourn the better. Leave me, and turn snitch, I should jist like to catch yer at it, that's all. No, no, captain, you an' I are too closely tied together ever to part, even the gallows von't not seprate us, at last ve shall depart in company vith each other; so yer may as vell make yer miserable life 'appy on that here score; Sam Filcher vill stick to yer to the last."

Beaufort again groaned, and struck his forehead with his clenched fist, but it made not the least favourable impression upon Sam Filcher.

"Now, Mister Beaufort," said Bob, who had hitherto remained silent, "wot's the use of a hagittatin' of yourself in this here way? Try and rouse yerself up, and be a man ag'in."

"He must do so," said Sam, sternly, and resolutely, "else him an' me vill have to fall out, an' he can't afford that here, I know. But I've hit upon the plan to vake him up, this here evening. Ve'll jist pay our old friends in Vestminster a visit, an' for fear of haccidents on the road, Bob, you must convey us to the crib in your weikle."

"No, no," said Beaufort, in a state of the

greatest alarm, and fixing on Sam a look of supplication; "not there—I dare not enter that den of crime in my present state of mind.

"Psha," impatiently returned Sam, "but I say yer must, yer shall, an I tell yer vot it is, captain, you've tried my kind temper so much this here last few hours, that I'm not in the humour to be disobeyed. That here's the long an' the short of it; hooman natur' can't stand it, and I'm not no more than a man yer knows."

The unhappy Beaufort was inclined to tell the impudent scoundrel that he foully libelled the name of man by daring to call himself one; but he thought it was better not to exasperate him by doing so, so he did not return any reply.

"I dare say," continued Filcher, "we shall be able to make the wisit pleasant among our old pals; we vill have a jolly night of it, and that'll raise yer spirits, guvner, and get rid of all these blue devils. Come, let us go to the little private snugery below; our friend, Bob, here must go out upon b'sness, an' no doubt he will be able to bring us all the news when he comes back, an' you an' I can talk matters over while he's gone. Come along."

Thus saying Sam Filcher took the arm of the wretched Beaufort, and rather forced than conducted him from the room, and down the dark and dirty staircase, followed by Bob.

They once more entered the little dark room; where Bob left them, promising to return in an hour or two, and bring them all the intelligence he could gather respecting the excitement caused by the fearful transactions of the previous night, and Sam and Beaufort were then left to themselves.

"Now, captain," said Filcher, as he filled a glass of some strong spirit, and compelled him to drink it, previous to partaking of a delicate little meal of pig's-fry, which the hospitable and considerate Mr. and Mrs. Jarvey Bob had provided for them, "now, captain, I say ag'in you must shake off this here blessed mollycholy, which is enuff to give a feller the measels to see, and be a man."

"A man," repeated Beaufort, in bitter accents of self-reproach, "no, I am not a man, I have long since forfeited the name, and been a wretch a villain, whom all should view with loathing and disgust."

"There, no more of that here nonsense," said Sam Filcher, impatiently, "I don't want to hear a sarmin't, an' I won't listen to it. So, if yer doesn't vish to hinsult me, you'll cut it at once. Myself an' Bob have been a hinspectin' and wallecin' the svag, an' ve find that it's a much better haul than ve at first thought it vos; so there now, the

thoughts of the tin that old Smoucher vill I dare say come down for it, ought to console yer for all the rest."

Beaufort returned no answer to this, but turned away from his old companion in crime with a look of abhorrence and disgust.

"You doesn't say not nuffin to that here," remarked Sam, "yer seem to treat the rowdy now with purfict contempt, as if yer vos purfictly hindependent, and meant to retire from b'sness."

"Filcher," said Beaufort, with a look of supplication, "if anything like a feeling of pity or forbearance remains within your guilty breast, I implore you cease to talk thus. Reflect upon the dreadful crime you have committed, and yield to compunction, remorse, and not to brutal levity."

"Ha, ha, ha!" again laughed the hardened miscreant, Filcher, "very pretty, an' very cutting too, if it vosn't as it's ag'in my religion, I'm blessed if I couldn't shed tears as big as lap-stones. But I say, guvner, wot a pity it is that yer should have mistaken yer wocashun; for I'd stake my solemn day that natur' meant yer for a parson 'stead of a prig. Ha, ha, ha!"

And the consummate villain laughed so violently at his self-imagined wit that the tears which any feeling of kindness or sympathy had never drawn forth started to his eyes.

Beaufort again averted his gaze, for he could not bear to look upon that ugly countenance which now appeared perfectly hideous and unnatural.

"Vell, vell," said Sam, when he had sufficiently recovered himself to speak, "I must not give vay too much to my nat'ral feelin's or I shall sartainly bust. Come, captain, drink."

Useless was it for the unhappy Beaufort to refuse, for the ruffian forced it upon him. He knew, he felt that every drop of the accursed drink he took, was liquid fire to his brain exciting him to delirium, but he was compelled to submit, even though immediate annihilation should follow, and perdition be his certain doom.

And with what perfectly fiendish exultation did Filcher ply the maddening spirit to his wretched companion—with what unbounded satisfaction did he watch the progress of its effect.

"Yes," he observed, after a brief pause, during which he had, by way of a change, been quietly communing with himself, "as I vos sayin' captain, the lads of the village vill no doubt be very glad to see us, for they haven't not had the 'onner of our society, since the night of the engagement vith the traps; an' as ve shall not be vithout the rowdy, as old Smoucher vill advance us some when he sees the svag, ve

shall be able to carry on to any extent, and have as jolly a night of it as the heart can wish for."

"I cannot—I will not go to that fearful den of infamy in my present state of mind," said Beaufort.

"But yer must," returned Sam, emphatically and resolutely.

Beaufort groaned.

"And hark yer, captain," continued Sam, "yer'd better not be in yer present state of mind, as yer calls it, when ve does go there, for that'd be dangerous, an' might tell tales. Yer understand me. It von't do to let the lads suspect as how ve knows or had anything to do with the b'sness of last night. So yer'd better vatch it, old feller, for if yer blab anything, I—vell, look out, that's all."

Beaufort too well understood the meaning of the villain's threats, and he shuddered, but returned no answer.

"Ye're silent, air yer?" said Sam, "not sulky I hope, cos that would be a bad job, an' mightn't agree with my temper jist now. Howsomdever, I von't be cross with yer, cos I happens to be in von of my wery best humours this here arternoon. So vake up, captain, and ve'll be as 'appy as sand boys by-an'-by."

Seeing how completely useless it was to remonstrate or supplicate the invulnerable and inexorable Filcher, and now fearing to offend him, Beaufort did endeavour to arouse himself, to banish thought for the present, at any rate, and even to try to humour the ruffian.

He therefore accepted the glass he offered him, and after that a second and a third, and at length under the influence of the drink, became quite reckless, and lost to all those feelings of remorse that had before so tortured him.

And much to the delight of Filcher.

"Brayvo, captain," he said, approvingly and encouragingly "this here's summat like—now yer yerself ag'in, and it does my heart good to see yer. Wot's the use of being dull and mollencholy about nuffin? Alwus take things cool an' pleasant as I does, and then ye'll be able to trot through life with a contented mind and a light heart in your buzum."

Having delivered this sage piece of wholesome advice—which Beaufort, however, although he appeared to do so, could not fully appreciate—Sam replenished his own glass, and that of his companion, and they both drank the contents with equal avidity.

And thus they continued to "enjoy" themselves—as Sam would have it—for an hour or two, till Beaufort became in that state that he felt fit to do anything that Filcher might require him, and he even was anxious for the time to arrive when

they should visit the den of infamy in Westminster.

At length Mr. Jarvey Bob returned, bringing with him another scoundrel of some importance, namely, the old Jew receiver of stolen property, Smoucher.

We will not trouble the reader with a description of this worthy gentleman, as he, no doubt, can form a pretty correct idea of such characters; suffice it to say that Smoucher was all that a crafty, designing, reckless villain could be, and that he looked his character to perfection.

Sam Filcher, with his natural good humour and friendly feeling towards one of the "purfeshun," politely pressed the Jew to take a glass; but Smoucher was too much of a man of business to partake of anything that might have a pernicious effect upon his calculating powers in striking a bargain; he, therefore, with an apology, begged to decline Sam's invitation, and having warmly congratulated the latter and Beaufort upon their previous night's exploits, and the success that had attended them, the bag with its valuable contents was removed from the place where it had been deposited, and old Smoucher went to work at once.

There was some haggling, and caviling, and hard contention before they could finally agree, but at length a bargain was struck—which, as a matter of course was by no means unfavourable to the Jew—the sum agreed upon was promptly paid, or as Sam Filcher more elegantly and characteristically called it, "paid down upon the nail," the bag was placed by Smoucher in a clothes bag—he having one of his fraternity waiting outside to receive it, and to carry it home for him—and after having now accepted Sam Filcher's invitation by tossing off a bumper in a style which showed he was by no means unaccustomed to indulge in such wholesome libations, the old Jew receiver took his departure, much to the relief of Beaufort, who had been in a state of much excitement while the stolen property was in sight, and being bargained for.

The sum of money which he now found to be in the possession of himself and Sam Filcher, also served to raise his spirits, and by the time he had partaken of another glass or two, he had banished all gloomy thoughts from his mind, stifled every feeling of remorse, and was ready to meet all the wishes, and to obey the instructions of the worthy Mr. Sam Filcher in everything.

The sharing of the ill gotten cash was the next important business to be transacted, and that was quickly disposed of in the most satisfactory manner to all parties. Bob was most liberally remunerated for the valuable services he had rendered, and for which he felt extremely grateful; the bulk of the

money Beaufort and Filcher then equally divided between each other, and they having all taken a friendly glass "upon the strength of it," that part of the business was completed to their heart's content.

Night came at last, and Sam and Beaufort, having managed sufficiently to metamorphose themselves to prevent immediate recognition by any one on the way, cautiously took their departure from the dwelling of Jarvey Bob, and hastened to meet their guilty associates.

Several of "the lads of the village," as Sam Filcher had called them, had already assembled in the den, and were enjoying themselves in the usual manner, beer, gin, brandy, rum, and tobacco being in great demand, and jokes,—not of the most refined description to be sure—oaths, and loud laughter, passed as freely as the glass.

A more striking collection of villainous-looking countenances could not possibly be seen, or easily imagined, and it is not necessary to add that the character of each individual perfectly answered to the index of his features.

"That was a clever crack at Lord Selborne's last night," observed one of the company, addressing himself to no one in particular, but to everybody in the room; "somebody has got a good haul."

"An' good luck to 'em too," returned a fellow who sat next to him, "they deserve it, for they are cracksmen as knows their b'sness, that's sartin, and I hope they vill not be cotched. I think that I could form a pretty good guess as to von as has had a hand in it."

"And that's Sam Filcher," said two or three of the party in a breath.

"Ah! the Sprig ov Myrtle, that's he," replied the man; "ve all know his abilities, an' onner him for it. I can't say quite so much for his friend and companion, the captain, as he calls him, he's willian enough no doubt, but it's the pluck as he vouts, the pluck, that's it."

In that opinion every one coincided, and after a few more observations of a similar description, the subject dropped, and they continued their intemperate indulgence with unabated spirit.

At length they were for a moment interrupted, by a peculiar whistle outside the door, which was secured by a bolt inside.

"Hollo!" said one of the ruffians, "there's some more of our pals come to visit us, open the door old blowbroth, and admit them, the more on us the merrier, say I."

The worthy host of this respectable establishment promptly obeyed this order, and Sam Filcher and Beaufort entered the room, and were received with the most hearty and vociferous demonstrations of welcome.

They immediately found themselves seated at the head of the festive board, as the honoured friends and associates of the respectable gentlemen congregated, and Sam Filcher, in order to convince them that it was the intention of himself and his companion to endeavour to "make the visit pleasant," lost no time in giving a "stiff" order to the landlord, namely, to cover the tables with the best of everything both to eat, drink, and smoke that his house could afford.

This order completed, on the most liberal scale, they all went to work in right earnest.

"Vell," remarked one of the company, "I am glad you've come, ve vere speakin' ov you and the captain, Sam, just afore yer entered the room."

"Vos yer now?" said Sam, "I hopes as how it vos nuffin disrespec'ful."

"More to'ther," answered the fellow; "on the contrary it vos all in yer praise, as it should be."

"Thank yer, my pippin," said Sam, with a grateful smile; "yer does me proud."

"Yes, Sam," observed another of the party, "ve vos a speaking ov that here little b'sness in Sen James's Squivare, last night."

Beaufort started, and could not help exhibiting some signs of alarm, but Sam Filcher maintained his usual coolness and self-possession.

"Wot b'sness?" he innocently demanded.

"Vy, the crack at Lord Selborne's, to be sure," was the reply.

"Oh, ah, yes," returned Sam, carelessly, and as though he did not feel much interest in the little b'sness alluded to; "I see, vos it ov much account?"

"As though you didn't know nothink about it," observed another of the company, "as though you and the captain hadn't not nothink to do with it. In course not."

Beaufort felt more uneasy than before, but Sam Filcher only smiled agreeably as he replied.

"I—now yer knows wery vell, that nayther myself or the captain couldn't not do sich a thing for the world. Howsomdever, ve're cumed here to enjoy ourselves, and not to talk about b'sness. Ve're left the shop at home. Here, old brandynose, don't yer see that the pots and the glasses is all empty? Come now, vak up, vill yer, and be on to yer vork. Ve mean to keep the game alive, I can tell yer, for ve doesn't kill a pig every day."

This speech was received with the most boisterous laughter and applause, and the landlord immediately bustled about with a hearty good will, to execute this second order, and the lawless ruffians continued their drunken and noisy revels with increased spirit.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE GIBBET ON THE HEATH.

The dull hours of night continued to pass merrily away with the guilty wretches in the thieves haunt, and nothing could exceed their riotous mirth, as the liquor worked its barneful effects.

It need scarcely be said that singing formed one of the principal features in the night's entertainment, and in which vocal display the jovial Sam Filcher highly distinguished himself and shone to great advantage, receiving the hearty pludits of his drunken audience.

Again and again he was called upon, and most readily responded to the call, till he was pretty well beaten, and at last observed:—

“Hold hard, my flowers, yer know how wery villin’ I’m to ‘bleege at any time, but my woful debilities is almost exhausted, an’ I’m nearly knocked out ov time. Howsomdever, I knows von more little bit ov a stave, which I’ll sing yer, an’ that must be the last to night, without you’d hav’ me chaunt over again all as I’ve sung afore. It’s not quite so flash an’ spicy as most ov my ditties are, but I hope you’ll excuse that, and now arter that here little bit on a hexplanashun, vith yer permishun, my svells, I’ll tear away!”

Thunders of applause followed this neat and gentlemanly speech, and Sam Filcher having first cleared his throat, or “vetted his whistle”—as he figuratively expressed it—with two thirds of a pot of heavy, and a small go of “satin,” did tear away to the following effect, his companions joining in chorus most heartily.

SAM FILCHER'S SONG.

Now!—Listen to me yer leary coves,
Loddy, foddy, tooral loddy, hey O!
Jist prick up yer ears, my leary coves,
Cos, I knows a stave yer dearly loves,
Vith my loddy, foddy, &c.

[Now chaunt.

Now!—My old buffer he learnt it me,
Vith my loddy, foddy, &c.,
’Tvos my old dad as learnt it me,
An’ so, in course, I learn it ye,
Vith my loddy, foddy, &c.

[Kore-us.

Now!—Fust, if on the cheap yer’d wish to live,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.,
If yer on nuffin a year would live,
A few vise lessons I vill give,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.

[Now chaunt.

Now!—This here you’ll find a famous plan,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.,

If yer’d be thought a spicy man,
Yer must fleece an’ svindle all yer can,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.

[Now chaunt.

Now!—Yer must vork the dodge vith skill,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.,
Dress fast rate, but mind yer still,
If the snip’s got cheek to present his bill,
Give him loddy, foddy, &c.

[Tear away.

Now!—To go the ‘hole hanimal don’t fail,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.,
Go the ‘hole hog from head to tail,
Then guv yer wictims all leg bail,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.

[Give it mouth.

Now!—If that here prociss is too slow,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.,
Vhy a quicker von I’ll quickly show,
Vhich is summat vorth yer vhole to know,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.

[On to it.

Now!—Get a couple of “bull-dogs,” extra proof,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.,
Keep fear of danger quite aloof,
Then you’ll be all right to pad the hoof,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.

[Out vith it.

Now!—“Stand and deliver,” that here’s the vord,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.,
Be’t dooke or squire, markis, lord,
Take no hexcuse, that here’s absurd,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.

[Rattle it out.

Now!—If the ochre yer’d not lack,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.,
An’ of fortins favyers have yer whack,
Vy, yer must learn a crib to crack,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.

[Kore-us.

Now!—So now, my kids, I’ve had my say,
Vith my loddy, foddy, &c.,
Do this—yer’ll live for never an’ a day,
If Jack Ketch don’t stop yer by the vay,
Vith a loddy, foddy, &c.

Now bellows it.

The enthusiastic applause which followed this beautiful, classical, sentimental, pathetic and instructive effusion, was tremendous, and must have been highly flattering to the distinguished and accomplished “perfeshnul” gentleman who had been graciously pleased to afford his delighted audience such a rare musical treat.

A first and a second “encore” was vociferously and unanimously demanded, and kindly responded to by Mr. Filcher, to the increased rapture of the critical gentlemen, in such matters, present, and he was then with great reluctance permitted to close from his vocal labours for that night—or rather morning, for by that time it was so—and to

enjoy his glass or his pot, and to do the *otium cum dignitate* in peace.

At length, as all good things must have an end, and every gentleman had drunk till he was full to the brim, they were compelled—as Sam Filcher elegantly expressed it—to “cry a go,” head after head dropped senseless on the table, or fell back in the chair, with gaping mouth and closed eyelids, soft slumber wrapped their troubled thoughts, their cares and anxieties in forgetfulness, and silence reigned in the thieves’ haunt which was broken only at intervals by certain nasal sounds from the sleepers, which were certainly more sonorous than harmonious or agreeable.

It was not till a late hour of the day that Sam Filcher and Beaufort awoke, about the same time, and then rubbing their eyes, and looking stupidly around them, they found that their dissipated companions were all gone, and that they were left alone in their glory.

“Well we have made a night on it, an’ not no mistake,” said Sam; “how d’yer feel now, captain?”

The “captain” made some half evasive reply, which Filcher did not clearly understand, but it was quite evident by his looks that he neither felt remarkably well, or exactly comfortable.

“My head’s preshus queer,” remarked Sam, “I’m afeared I took a leetle drop too much last night, an’ I doesn’t feel disactly *crumpets mintus*—as theyses in the clarsicks—now. This here won’t do, captain, we must try an’ pull our preshus selves together ag’in. But fust let’s see if the tin’s all right, cos some of our friends might have helped themselves, while we vos asleep, only kindly to take care of it, of course.”

They did examine their money, and found much to their satisfaction, as far as they could guess what they had spent, that their brother thieves had acted honestly by them.

“All right,” said Sam, “we’re well breeched, captain, and shan’t be able to get rid of all the tin we’ve got for a week or two, vithout ve thinks proper, in a fit of disgust, to chuck it away, an’ I don’t think as how either of us is quite green enuff to do that here. I say, guvner, I’ll tell yer vot ve’ll do now, jist to get ourselves right.”

“What’s that?” demanded Beaufort, who at that moment could not distinctly see any means by which he could hope to get himself “to rights” after the last night’s extraordinary debauch; “go and get beastly drunk again, eh?”

“No,” replied Sam, “not that here disactly, ve have had one skin full this here last few hours, I think, an’ ve shall only want a little refresher now an’ then. But ve shall only get vorse instead of better if

we stops any longer in this here damned stinking dunjin of a place. We must go an’ wegetate.”

“What do you mean?” interrogated Beaufort, impatiently, “why don’t you speak real English?”

“Vell, so I does,” answered Sam, indignantly, “but it’s only you as doesn’t understand the langidge. Ve must ruralise it, I s’pose yer knows vot that here means. Go a little vay out of town, to blow the dust off us a bit, an’ get the fresh air. There, now yer understands, don’t yer? an’ vot do yer think of my proposal?”

“Why, it’s not a bad one, Sam,” replied Beaufort, “but we had better remain here till the dusk of the evening, when we are not so likely to be particularly noticed by any one. It might be dangerous for us to go forth in the open daylight.”

“Stuff,” returned Sam, “you’re beginnin’ to alarm yerself ag’in. Vot have ye got to fear? There vos no von as seed us at the house of Lord Selborne at the time of the robbery, or afore it, ‘cept the old butler, an’ as he’s no more, he can’t holler about it yer know. Come, ve’d better be off at vonce—no von can suspect as how ve knows nuffin about the b’sness. Stop, let’s fust look to the state of my pistols.”

“What do you want to do that for?” hastily demanded Beaufort, with a look of alarm.

“B’sness, b’sness,” replied Filcher, taking the pistols from his pocket, and preparing to charge them, “musn’t not never lose sight of that here, yer know, captain. Who knows but ve might meet vith a customer in the course of our country rambles this here evening, an’ though ve are pretty flush of rowdy jist now, there’s not no harm in adding to the bank, if ve’ve only go a chance.”

“Not now, Filcher,” said Beaufort, earnestly, and with a look of persuasion, “there is no occasion for business, as you call it, jist now, we had enough of that the night before last, in all conscience.”

“Nonsense; don’t be so pertikler and so qualmish,” returned Sam, “it’ll be all as right as a trevit, ‘pend on it; so jist yer bustle yerself up a bit, then ve’ll take von parting drop vith old brandynose, and be off at vonce.”

Beaufort raised no further objection—though he felt far from easy and confident—and Sam Filcher having re-deposited the pistols in his pocket, summoned the landlord of this respectable hostelry, whom he informed of the intentions of himself and Beaufort—of which he expressed his approbation—and requested him to bring a reviver for all three of them at parting.

It was quickly done, and Sam and his com-

panion having bid the worthy host adieu, emerged from the den into the street, and proceeded to get out of the locality or anywhere, where they were likely to be known, as quickly as they could.

"Had we not better return to Bob's house, and get him to drive us in his vehicle, where we should be safe from observation?" suggested Beaufort, cautiously, as they proceeded.

"No," answered Sam, "that here'd cause too much delay; asides it wouldn't answer my vishes, vvhich is to foot it, cos yer see, the hexersisse vill do us good. Come along vill yer? An' no more hobjexions, if yer please."

Beaufort saw it was useless to try to persuade Sam—who seemed determined to have it all his own way—and he therefore abandoned the attempt, but he continued to look cautiously and fearfully about him, to see that they were not observed, or watched by any one, from whom there might be reason to apprehend danger.

Sam Filcher, however, was on his guard, and led the way by the most bye, and unfrequented streets, until they had got to some considerable distance from the neighbourhood, and by that time the shadows of evening had begun to fall around, and Beaufort became a little more confident.

They suddenly came upon a brick wall which enclosed a building, and here Beaufort suddenly stopped, and uttered a faint cry of alarm as his eyes fell upon something which he trembled to see.

"Vot's the matter vith yer now?" hastily demanded Sam Filcher, and with an oath, "vot the devil are yer starin' at in that manner, an' a trembling' as if yer'd got the hagur? Hav' yer fears got hold ov that here preshus chicken-heart or yourn again?"

"Look! don't you see?" replied Beaufort, in an agitated voice, and pointing to the wall.

"In course I does, without barnacles," said Sam, "an' vot ov it? It's only a bill, a hofferin' two hundred pounds revard to any von who may give sich hinformation as shall lead to the happerhehenshun, an' conviction ov the—my eyes! the perpetraters ov the robbery an murder at Lord Selborne's. Come along, captain, through this dark lane, and into the fields as quick as thought, blow'd if, this here's at all a pleasant thing to look at."

For the first time since the perpetration of that dreadful crime—the brief facts of which the placard at which himself and Beaufort were gazing—the guilty, hardened, and brutal Sam Filcher, exhibited signs of fear, if not remorse. His knees knocked together, his face became ghastly pale, his features, for a moment or two were slightly convulsed and his lips quivered.

He cast a fearful glance around, as though he expected to see the officers of justice approaching to apprehend him, then grasping the wrist of the still more terrified Beaufort, he hurried him away from the spot as fast as he could, and without saying another word.

Along a dark and narrow lane—over-shadowed on either side by tall trees, and at the corner of which the building, on the wall of which the bill that had so greatly excited their terrors, was posted, stood—they proceeded at the top of their speed, and without meeting with any one, and passing through a stile at the end of it, they entered—as Sam had said, and he appeared to be perfectly well acquainted with the locality—upon the green fields, which were now in their bright verdure, smiling in the pale moonlight, and looking too beautiful for the feet of such guilty wretches as them to pollute and desecrate with their tread.

But it was not until they had proceeded to some distance, and had assured themselves that there was no one near to observe them, that they ventured to stop to take breath, and endeavour to recover themselves from the panic into which they had been thrown.

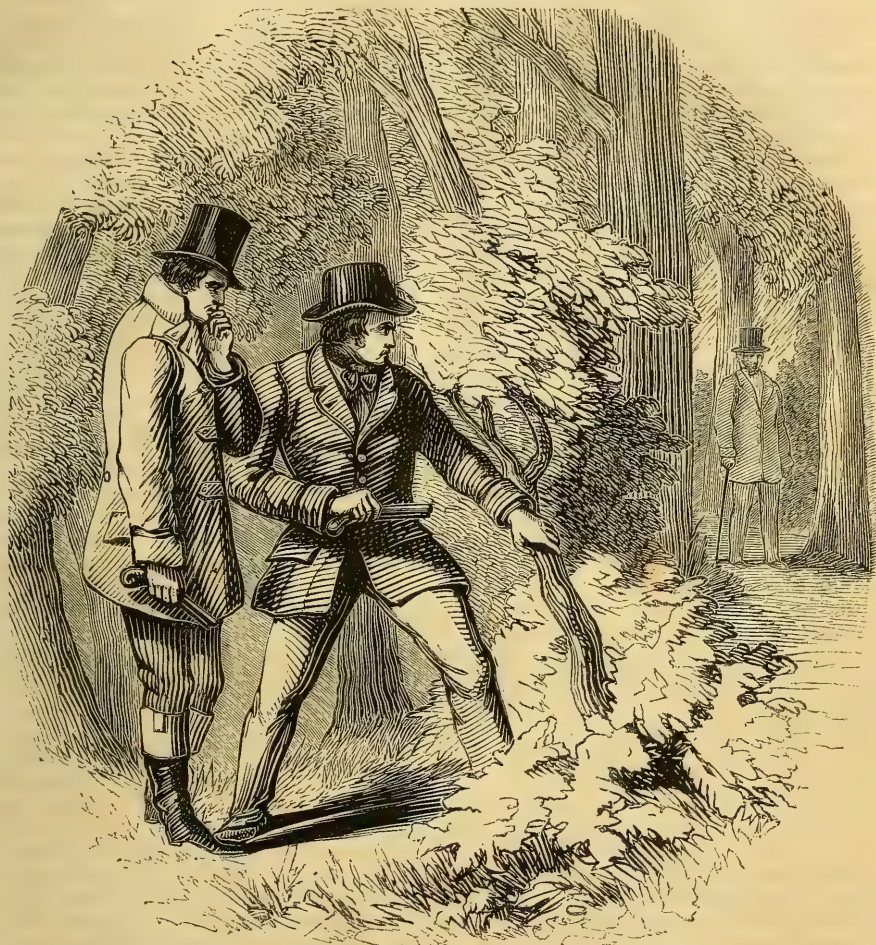
And then, after puffing and blowing a little, with the heat, and the speed at which he had been proceeding, and a slight twinge of the features, Sam Filcher quickly became himself again, and every symptom of the temporary fear which had just before assailed him, vanished.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, in his usual coarse and careless manner, "my preshus eyes! ha! ha! only now for to go for to think that Sam Filcher, the Sprig of Myrtle, an' the pride of Vestminster, should make sich a damned fool ov hisself, as to be frightened by a sheet of printed paper, the same as if as how he had seen a hobbergoblin"; ha! ha! vot a start; vell I never! ha! ha! ha!"

And the fun of the idea seemed so much to tickle his fancy, that he continued to laugh till he was red in the face, and the tears gushed to his eyes.

Beaufort who had far from recovered from his alarm, looked at him for a moment or two with mingled feelings of horror and disgust, and then—although he well knew that all expostulation was completely thrown away upon the insensible ruffian—said—

"Forbear, Filcher, again I desire you to cease this brutal levity, and treat not that with indifference and derision which may be the means of bringing us both ere long to a fearful and ignominious death. The bill which we have just seen speaks a solemn warning, which you, yes even you, with all your bravado, cannot I know be quite insensible to."



"It's a lie!" exclaimed Sam, passionately, and with an oath; "it don't not trouble me at all; do yer take me to be sich a lily-hearted cur as yerself? If I thought as how I vos, or vos at all likely ever to be so, blest if I wouldn't cut this here preshus wizen of mine directly, and only jist think vot a terrible loss to society Sam Filcher the Sprig of Myrtle would be. Why they wouldn't not never recover it by any possible means vot-somdever."

Beaufort looked at him with increased disgust and hatred for a minute, but did not condescend to waste his breath to make any reply, and—after a pause, during which he had been cautiously looking about him, and as he himself very expressively said, at the same time "axing himself a few kevestuns,"—Sam said—

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"It's no use a standing pattering here about nuffin, so come along, captain, ve'd better get on the road."

"Where are you going?" interrogated Beaufort.

"Can't say; no vhere's in pertikler."

"Hadrn't we better return to town?"

"No."

"What place is this?"

"Why, don't yer see," answered Sam, "you ought to know this here place vell enuff, seeing as how you an' I have done good b'sness not far from it, some years ago."

"I don't remember it."

"Yer don't vant to do, I s'pose," returned Filcher; "vell then I'll jist vake yer up. Another kevarter of a 'our vill bring us on to the heath, Hownslow Heath, I mean. Now does yer begin to diskiver yerself, captain?"

"Yes, yes," replied Beaufort, hastily, "and with a look of terror; "let us turn back, Filcher."

"Turn back be damned," said Filcher, with a look of the most ineffable scorn; "vot for?"

"I dare not cross the heath to-night."

"Oh, I see, afeard of the gibbet, an' that here skilinton that's in it, eh? Ha, ha, ha, vell now, I'm a rum feller, I dare say, but I never thinks of a coming this here vay without a paying of my 'spects to the skilinton in the gibbet. Praps yer doesn't know who he vos; but I does, poor feller, for many a 'appy lush we've had together when he vos alive, an' up in the stirrups. Why, them here old bones vot is fast a droppin' to pieces is all as is left of my werry old pertikler, the celybrayed Jerry Jumper, von of the best roadsmen an' slashing crackmen as never vos. He vos topped about fifteen years ago, an' that here's the vay in which they sarved his preshus remains afterwards. But I don't suppose he cared much about their hanging of his karkis up to dry. Howsomdever, he's never been known to grumble about it, as I've heerd."

"I shall go back, Sam," said Beaufort, turning to do so.

"No yer don't," returned Filcher, laconically, but resolutely, and grasping his wrist; "why d'yer pursewere in a makin' of such a blessed fool of yerself? Kim on, I say, for I'm in a hurry jist now. On tother side of the heath is the Cat an' Bagpipes, von of my old hot-hells; they sells fust rate gutter an' blue ruin there, an' there ve can enjoy ourselves arter this here preshus walk, an' put up for the night, if ve likes. Kim along—an' no more humbug."

Filcher forced him from the spot as he thus spoke, and Beaufort had no alternative but to submit in silence, though he trembled as he did so.

A few minutes more, as Sam had said, brought them on to the heath, upon which the moon was then shining brightly.

Beaufort shuddered as he cast a fearful glance across that place, rendered notorious by the many dreadful crimes that from time immemorial had been perpetrated upon it; but Sam Filcher, on the contrary, seemed to view it with the most profound reverence and admiration as something sacred.

"Ah," he observed, "many a fine feller as has been worms meat for years, has extinguished themselves on this here preshus old heath. Vell, as the poet ses, all 'onner to their mem'ry, I say."

Having thus feelingly delivered himself of this graceful tribute to the memory of departed worth, Sam Filcher sighed, and once more proceeded, still retaining his hold of Beaufort's wrist.

"We can avoid the gibbet, Sam," said Beaufort, tremulously.

"I wouldn't do so for the *Hinges*," replied Filcher, "vot, cross this here blessed heath without a paying of my 'spects to my old pal Jerry? No, no, not never, I think as how Sam Filcher knows hisself better than that here. There it is, svinging in the wind; Don't yer hear it creak as it turns and twistes?"

Yes, Beaufort did indeed behold it in the moonlight, at a short distance from them, and he heard it creak and rattle in the wind. He trembled and hesitated to proceed; but Sam, with an oath at his cowardice, forced him along, and the next moment they stood immediately before the gibbet, and Beaufort stared aghast at its fearful contents, which consisted of the blackened and mouldering bones of a skeleton—the ghastly skeleton of the renowned highwayman and housebreaker Jerry Jumper, as he had been familiarly called in his lifetime, and who the worthy Mr. Sam Filcher had lauded so highly.

Beaufort trembled in every limb, for he fancied to himself what his own fate was but too likely to be, and he could not resist the horror of his feelings.

But Sam Filcher gazed at the gibbet and its contents without exhibiting the least emotion, unless it was a feeling of sorrow and regret for the departed, whose ghastly remains he now looked upon.

"Ah, there he is, poor feller," said the villain, with peculiar pathos, "at least all that the carrion crows have left of him. Poor Jerry, blessed if I couldn't almost fancy as how he vos a looking at me through them here old eyeless sockets of his'n, an' that I heerd his jolly laugh as he used to rattle it out when he an' me vos a doing our pongelow together vith our pals. Poor Jerry—vell, it's a fate as all good fellers must kim to, an' I dare say I shall have the 'onner of svinging by the side of yer blessed old bones when my time comes, that here's one consolation."

"I implore you," said Beaufort, in the same tremulous voice, and with a look of terror, "to leave this fearful spot. What gratification can you feel in standing here and gazing at that awful and ghastly object?"

"You're a drivelling fool," replied Filcher, contemptuously, "but I s'pose I must humour yer for vonce in a vay; mind, yer must show none of this here nonsense where ve're a going, d'yer hear? Now, kim along, for I'm getting dry. Good-bye, Jerry, my old trojint, I can't be vith yer always, yer knows."

With these words the ruffian reluctantly moved from the spot, and he and his companion quickening their pace, soon found themselves on the opposite side of the heath,

and seated in the snug parlour of the Cat and Bagpipes, with the necessary refreshment before them.

And here, for a time, at least, we must leave the two worthy gentlemen.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

PHOEBE, HENRY ASHFORD, AND THE GIPSY SYBIL.

We will now return to Phoebe Mayfield and her friends, whom we have necessarily neglected for a time, in order to relate the particulars that have occupied the last two or three chapters.

We left our heroine in a considerable state of excitement after her painful meeting and interview with Lord Selbourne, and it was several days ere she could recover from the torturing effects that scene had produced.

There were times when Phoebe could almost persuade herself that the penitence of Lord Selborne was sincere, and a feeling fast approaching to one of mingled pity and regret would steal over her, but it was only transient, all that she had suffered through his heartless treachery was recalled most vividly to her memory, and every other sentiment but those of disgust and abhorrence towards him were stifled in her bosom; and she could not but believe that there was no punishment which he could suffer from the remorse of a guilty conscience that could be too severe for him.

But could she really have correctly read the thoughts and feelings that agitated the breast of that unhappy and misguided nobleman, her gentle bosom must have been moved to compassion, and although it was utterly impossible that she could ever forget, she might have endeavoured to forgive, and to beseech of heaven to pardon him too."

The affectionate and assiduous attentions of Henry and his sister towards that fair and amiable being who was as precious to them as their own lives, if possible, increased daily, hourly; they felt dull and uneasy when she was absent from their presence, and those to Phoebe were moments of the greatest enjoyment when she was in their society, and was afforded an opportunity of evincing to them her full sense of the large debt of gratitude which she believed and felt she owed them.

And thus weeks rolled on without anything of particular moment, or worthy of a place in these pages, occurring. Prosperity continued to crown the industry and perseverance of Henry Ashford at the farm, and he looked forward with the most sanguine hopes and expectations when Phoebe,

as his wife, would, if possible, have still greater claims to share his good fortune, and to feel the deepest interest in his welfare, than she had at present.

Henry had even ventured to press her to name the earliest day for their nuptials, and willing as her heart was to accede to his wishes, the still melancholy state of her unfortunate parent alone made her hesitate to do so, and her lover had therefore no other alternative than patiently to endeavour to delay the blissful consummation of his fondest hopes and wishes.

At length, however—especially as a favourable change again took place in the health of her father, and his physician expressed the most flattering belief in his ultimate recovery—our heroine did yield to the urgent persuasions of Henry and Amy and promised at the expiration of three months from that period, if nothing occurred in the interim to cause them to abandon the idea, to become his wife.

Great were now the joy and expectations of all, and Henry and his sister set themselves about the welcome task of making all the necessary preparations for the important and auspicious event.

The inhabitants of the village, too, and the surrounding neighbourhood, by whom they were so highly esteemed, also looked forward to the day which was to unite the fates of those two faithful beings, whose hearts had been put to so many severe trials, with the greatest pleasure and joyful anticipation, and heartily and sincerely wished that every happiness might attend them as a just reward for the numerous vicissitudes it had been their lot to, and which they so patiently endured.

It need scarcely be said that there were no persons who felt a deeper interest in the forthcoming event than the worthy Mr. and Mrs. Stubbles, who were determined to act on the most liberal and hospitable scale on the joyous occasion, in order to do full honour to those whom they so highly esteemed.

But notwithstanding the willing assent which Phoebe had given to become the wife of one whom she considered to be more than worthy of her, and whom she so truly and fondly loved, there were times when the most torturing doubts and fears would beset her mind, and which tended in a great measure to mar the unbounded happiness she would otherwise have experienced.

Those strange apprehensions and misgivings she could not help encouraging while Lord Selborne still existed, and many mysterious circumstances associated with her unfortunate connection with him remained unexplained, and Henry Ashford, who clearly read her thoughts and feelings, endeavoured

all that he could to banish them, but only indifferently and partially succeeded.

We have said that several weeks continued to roll on in this manner without anything of particular importance taking place, and we will therefore not seek to tire the patience of the reader by dwelling upon matters of not sufficient interest, but come at once to an incident which caused the lovers and the gentle Amy considerable alarm at the time.

Scarcely an evening was permitted to pass away, when the weather would permit, without the lovers—after Henry's labours of the day were over—rambling from the farm, among the beautiful rural scenery in the neighbourhood, and in those pleasant walks Amy frequently accompanied them.

Those were indeed delightful moments, in which Henry and Phoebe poured forth their whole souls into each other's ears, and had a bright foretaste of the almost more than earthly happiness which they had hoped was in store for them.

At such times, every recollection of the sorrows of the past was permitted to be banished from their minds, and they indulged alone in bright visions of the future, which they fondly trusted, with the blessing of the Almighty, would be realised.

It will appear certain to the reader, that in those pleasant rambles the lovers never failed to pay a visit to the cottage which was carefully kept in the same state of order and simple beauty to which it had been restored, and there our heroine passed many of her most happy but at the same time melancholy moments.

It was at such times, too, that she often had the sad satisfaction of beholding her poor father, when he was brought there by his keepers, without being observed by him, of gazing upon his venerable and revered features, and of listening to the loved tones of his voice; and whilst scalding tears would fill her eyes and stream down her cheeks, how fervent were the mental prayers she offered up to heaven for blessings upon his aged head, and for his speedy recovery.

Sometimes the lovers were tempted by the fineness of the weather, or by the charm of their own conversation, to extend their walks beyond the usual limits, and it was upon one of the latter occasions that the event occurred to them which we are now about to relate.

The evening was indeed most beautiful for the season of the year which was rather advanced, and feeling refreshed, and their spirits exhilarated, they continued to ramble farther, unmindful of the lapse of time, and of course having no reason to apprehend any threatened danger.

The last rays of the setting sun had just sunk in golden pomp behind the western

hills, leaving a soft mellow tinge upon the fields and valleys; there was a calm silence pervaded all around, which was scarcely broken by the gentle sighing of the breeze, which came fresh and fragrant from the parting breath of many flowers to the senses, and all in nature at that hour was too lovely to induce the rambler to retire from its enjoyment.

Henry and Phoebe (this was one of the occasions, it should have been mentioned, that Amy did not accompany them) totally absorbed in delightful conversation, as well as charmed and refreshed by the beauty of the weather, did not abandon their walk, but they sauntered slowly on, totally regardless of the direction they took.

It is almost needless to say that their conversation was principally upon their own future prospects, and most glowing and flattering was the picture that the fervid imagination and sanguine hopes of Henry Ashford drew of the happiness which was in store for them.

"Oh, Phoebe," he said, "dear Phoebe, "with what powerful, what indescribable emotions does my heart throb, at the joyful anticipation of that happy day, when at the altar, and in the presence of heaven, I shall be permitted to call you by the holy, the sacred name of wife. When the golden vision of halcyon bliss I have for so many years ventured to indulge in, but which fate has hitherto so cruelly deferred, shall be realised, and all those sorrows which we have both experienced, and with such proper fortitude, patience and resignation endured, shall be at an end. I can scarcely control my feelings within the bounds of reason at the transporting thought. And those bright fond hopes are not doomed to be disappointed, dear Phoebe, I feel convinced that they are not, and in that blessed assurance am content."

Phoebe was about to make some reply, but she was prevented from doing so, and they were both startled by a harsh and unnatural laugh which seemed close at their elbow, but looking up they could perceive no one near them, the individual who had thus rudely and unceremoniously interrupted them, being probably concealed behind a cluster of trees that grew near the spot on which they were at that time standing.

Phoebe felt alarmed, and clung timidly to her lover, for the voice, as she imagined, was familiar to her ears, and she could not but entertain a secret dread of what was about to take place.

Henry, however, who, of course, was not to be so easily intimidated, but at the same time felt himself indignant at the vulgar interruption, probably by some prying, ignorant rustic, looked eagerly towards the place

from whence the laughter had proceeded, but still without being able to see any one, in an angry and peremptory voice demanded:—

"Who is it that dares thus to mock and insult me? If they are not insensible to every decent feeling, let them at once come forward and explain themselves."

There was another sarcastic and scornful laugh in reply to this, and still further exasperated, in spite of the timid looks of our heroine, who clung to him more closely than before, Henry was about to hasten to the place where the individual was evidently concealed, when he was prevented from so doing by the disgusting and hideous form of what could scarcely be said to resemble woman, which slowly and stealthily crawled from behind the trees, and stood before them, one hand resting on the head of a low crutch which she carried to support her bent and tottering frame, and the other pointing menacingly and warningly towards them.

Phoebe could not help giving utterance to an exclamation of terror, and Henry exhibited some surprise and emotion, for it was the same mysterious old gipsy sybil who had so frequently before appeared to them under the most strange and alarming circumstances.

Her form and features had, if possible, become more frightful and revolting than ever, and she fixed a look upon Henry and his fair companion which was expressive of bitter mockery and malice.

Her hair hung dishevelled over her neck and shoulders, her naked flesh was to be seen from various holes in her dirty, tattered garment, and altogether she was as repulsive and hateful a looking object as can very well be imagined.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

GATHERING CLOUDS.—THE WARNING.

For some minutes the mysterious hag stood in the same attitude, with her unearthly eyes fixed full upon the lovers, while Phoebe stared aghast, and awaited with trembling anxiety and curiosity to hear what she had to say.

"How now, mysterious woman, if such indeed you are," at length Henry sternly and firmly demanded, "foul harbinger of evil, what means this intrusion? For what purpose do you again appear before those whom you have so frequently before annoyed and insulted by your presence? Speak your business and begone."

A scornful grin still more frightfully distorted the ugly features of the sybil, as after the lapse of a second or two, in the

most harsh, croaking, and unnatural tones she thus replied—

"The sybil comes to warn and be obeyed, not to be commanded. Henry Ashford, and the fair being who trembles as she now hangs upon his arm, will do well not to scorn her words."

"We will not listen to you," said Henry, firmly, and endeavouring to encourage the terrified Phoebe by a look.

"But you must, you shall listen to my words," exclaimed the singular being, resolutely, "it is my will that you should do so, and you have no power to resist it."

"Imposter."

"Imposter!—ah, beware what you say. Woe to them who dare seek to offend me."

"Why do you seek those who require not your presence? and for what purpose do you thus seek to intimidate them?" interrogated Henry, losing none of his firmness and self-possession.

"To warn them against plunging thoughtlessly and needlessly into that which may bring misery if not destruction to them," replied the sybil; "nay, Henry Ashford, you cannot, you dare not despise my words, however you may affect to do so. I see it in your changing colour, your restless eye, your quivering lip."

"This is a bitter mockery, a vile attempt to impose upon my credulity, and to make me the victim of some sinister design," said Henry, after a pause, "but it shall not succeed. Either at once explain yourself, or instantly begone."

"I have told you before, rash, haughty boy," returned the old woman, "that I must be obeyed not commanded. You little know the power of her whom you thus pretend to treat with scorn and defiance."

"Psha," exclaimed Henry, impatiently, "this is trifling, and cannot have the least effect on me, more than to excite my utmost contempt. You have been listening to the conversation between myself and Phoebe Mayfield, and now seek to impose upon and alarm us by your idle predictions."

"I heard you give way to vain hopes and expectations," returned the sybil, "they will not be realised, at least not for the present, and I therefore seek to arouse your delusive dream of speedy happiness, which can only end in disappointment. The marriage between yourself and her who now stands trembling by your side is forbidden—it must not take place."

In spite of his efforts to remain firm, and to treat the mysterious woman's words with scorn, Henry Ashford could not but feel impressed by the emphatic manner in which she spoke, and our heroine, who was too greatly agitated so say a word, during the time of this singular interview, could not

forbear an exclamation of mingled surprise, anguish and despair, at the last observations of the sybil, and she trembled violently in every limb.

"Ah," cried the ancient gipsy, gazing with something like a look of compassion, or at least as well as her ugly features were capable of expressing such a feeling, upon the pale countenance of the agitated girl, "you tremble, damsel, and well you may, for the cup of your sorrows is not yet filled to the brim; the time is yet distant when the dark clouds that have so long obscured your fate shall be dispersed. Beware, yourself and your lover stand upon the brink of destruction, and one false, one rash step will not only bring ruin, but bitter shame and remorse upon you."

Phoebe again looked appalled at the sybil, but could not utter a word. Every observation which had fallen from her lips had penetrated deeply to her heart, and even Henry could not help being startled by the strange prognostications that the sybil so vehemently uttered.

But he quickly recovered himself, and in somewhat subdued tones, but the same firmness of demeanour, he said—

"Old woman, what your motives may be in thus endeavouring to alarm those who never did you any possible injury, I know not, but it is time that there was an end of this. What mean your last ambiguous observations?"

"They mean," replied the gipsy, "that every law and right at present forbid the union of yourself and Phoebe; and that should you persist in it a curse will pursue you both. Mark my words, and rest assured that, in spite of your scepticism, they will be fulfilled; as I have once before predicted, blood must be shed, murder must be committed ere the once happy and innocent Phoebe Mayfield can become the lawful bride of Henry Ashford."

Phoebe uttered an exclamation of horror and sunk senseless in the arms of her lover, and when he for an instant removed his eyes from her pale countenance in order to address the sybil, he found that she was gone.

Astonishment, incredulity, and anguish agitated the breast of Henry, who gazed vacantly in the direction which he imagined the old woman to have taken, and for a moment or two he was so bewildered that he scarcely knew what he was about. The last words that she had so emphatically spoken, however, seemed to ring in his ears with thrilling effect, and he could not but reflect upon them with a sensation of fear which he had before believed himself to be quite incapable.

But his anxious attention was now called to the insensible Phoebe, on whom he feared

that the alarming observations or predictions of the sybil, as she called herself would have the most painful effect, and he endeavoured by every means in his power to recal her to consciousness, in which he at last succeeded, but so great was her agitation and alarm, that it was not till after she had given free vent to a copious flood of tears that she could at all recover herself.

Henry by the most tender and soothing observations endeavoured to tranquillise her feelings, but he found that a most difficult task to accomplish, notwithstanding that Phoebe fully appreciated his affectionate efforts, and tried by every means in her power to conquer her feelings.

It was now night, and rather dark and cheerless, in comparison with the fineness of the day and evening, the moon, which had arisen, only showing her face at intervals from behind a mass of clouds, and as the air had become keen, Henry was anxious that they should return home, where he knew that his sister would be impatiently awaiting them, with as little delay as possible.

"Come, dear Phoebe," he said, "let us quit this lonely spot, and once more seek the society of Amy, who may probably begin to feel surprised and uneasy at the length of our absence."

Phoebe made no reply, but after casting an anxious look around through the darkness as though she again expected to see the repulsive form and features of the old woman whose mysterious words and conduct had so much alarmed her, she suffered him to conduct her from the spot.

They proceeded to some little distance in silence, but at length our heroine in a melancholy and agitated voice said—

"Oh, Henry, how torturing and alarming is this mysterious adventure; and how do I shudder when I think of the awful and threatening observations of that fearful old woman."

"Endeavour to banish them from your memory, Phoebe," returned her lover, "or at least give them not a serious thought, for they are indeed unworthy of it. Why should the wild observations and prognostications of a maniac or impudent imposter trouble us?"

"Alas," sighed Phoebe, "there was something so earnest and impressive in the manner in which she uttered them, that it is impossible for me to despise them or to treat them with that indifference which you would advise, Henry. I fear that cruel fate is still against us, and that fresh troubles are in store for us to crush those bright hopes we had so fondly formed and cherished."

"Exert yourself to the utmost, dear Phoebe,

I implore you, to dismiss those painful thoughts and dismal forebodings from your mind," said Henry, with a look of affectionate persuasion.

"It is impossible," she returned, "they will continue to haunt my imagination, in spite of all my efforts, and the longer I reflect on them, the more powerful and irresistible becomes the impression they have made. But the latter fearful predictions of the sybil, what terrible doubts, surmises, and conjectures torture and distract my brain when I think of them. If we are to believe in the predictions of this mysterious woman, Henry (and I must confess that notwithstanding I would fain do so, I cannot become quite incredulous) we must not, dare not think of uniting our fates at present, lest we would plunge ourselves into irretrievable ruin and misery, and that a deed of blood must be perpetrated ere."

"Oh, interrupted Henry impatiently," that idea is far too monstrous, too improbable, my dear Phoebe, to give it any serious consideration even for a moment. Besides it is only giving way to the weakness of superstition, to place any confidence in the extravagant and ridiculous prognostications of this wretched old creature, which coming from such a source particularly are only worthy of pity and contempt."

"Oh, would that I could think so, Henry," returned Phoebe, "but even at the risk of appearing weak and credulous, I cannot do so. How deeply do I regret that this event should ever have occurred to us."

"In that wish I sincerely coincide," replied her lover, "but I pray you, Phoebe, not to unnecessarily agitate yourself, and to try to conquer the feelings to which the strange and unpleasant occurrence has given rise."

Phoebe shook her head mournfully, but she still endeavoured to comply with his advice."

They had by this time arrived at the farm, which they entered, and found Amy—who as her brother had anticipated began to feel alarmed at the length of their absence—just in the act of putting on her bonnet and cloak to go in search of them.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

GLOOMY FOREBODINGS.

The gratification of Amy at the return of her brother and our heroine, was fully evinced by the manner in which she welcomed them.

"Dear brother and Phoebe," she remarked, "you must have extended your walk

greatly to be so long away from home, and I must confess that I began to feel most anxious for your return, for you know that I feel sad and lonely when deprived of your society. But dear me, Phoebe, how pale and agitated you look, and you Henry appear excited. Tell me, I pray you, what is the cause of this? Has anything happened to disturb you since you have been away from home?"

"Yes, Amy," replied her brother, "we have indeed met with rather an exciting and unpleasant adventure, and I am afraid that it will be some time before Phoebe will be able to banish it from her recollection. I am happy to think, however, that I was with her at the time, or it is impossible to say what the consequences might have been."

"Alas, Amy," observed our heroine, "I assure you as your brother can vouch for, that I am not thus agitated without good reason, the adventure was one of the most extraordinary and alarming description, and I cannot think of it without fear and misgivings."

Amy's curiosity was excited, and she requested to be made acquainted with the particulars, with which her brother complied, and we need not say with what astonishment and interest she listened to him, being frequently compelled to interrupt him in order to give expression to her feelings.

"This is indeed a most extraordinary and disagreeable event," she remarked, when Henry had concluded; "and I do not wonder, my dear Phoebe, at the agitation you exhibit. What can be the real character of this mysterious old woman, or the motives for her singular conduct?"

"Indeed I am at a loss to conjecture," replied our heroine, "and the longer I endeavour to unravel the mystery, the more do I become involved in doubt and perplexity. I would fain treat it with contempt, and try to banish it from my memory, but find it impossible to do so."

"'Tis strange, most strange and inexplicable," said Amy, after a moment's reflection; "but still I cannot help thinking that the only probable conclusion to arrive at is, that this singular being is either some unfortunate maniac or impudent imposter."

"That is just my opinion, Amy," said her brother, "and I need not say how anxious I am that Phoebe should endeavour to think so too. To believe in the wild assertions, and idle prophecies of such a miserable old creature, is simply preposterous, and were it not for her great age, it would be nothing more than just an proper that she should be severely punished, and as it is, she ought certainly to be confined in some lunatic asylum. Come, my dear Phoebe, I beg of you to arouse yourself from the gloomy train

of thought, and the dismal forebodings which the words of the so-called sybil have excited in your breast, and depend upon it no harm will come of this adventure."

"I should be most happy to do so," answered Phoebe, "but at present I cannot, especially when I remember the remarkable manner in which her predictions were fulfilled. There is something about the character and conduct of this old woman, which I find it totally impossible to penetrate. Her appearance to me has ever been the harbinger of some approaching evil."

"Such is the impression which you have allowed to get possession of your mind, Phoebe," observed Amy, "but still I cannot help thinking that it is all imagination, and I should be most happy to see you arrive at the same conclusion."

"Well said, my dear sister," remarked Henry, "and I perfectly coincide in your views and wishes. Come, Phoebe, I know you will exert yourself to conquer these very natural, but at the same time torturing thoughts and feelings, and fear not but the just God above will watch over and protect you, and avert all those evils which you now so seriously, but I trust, groundlessly, apprehend."

Our heroine fixed upon him and his amiable sister a look of gratitude, which spoke far more eloquently than language could possibly have done, and did endeavour to tranquillise her feelings, and in some measure succeeded.

After some further conversation, as it was then getting late, they separated for the night, and Phoebe retired to her chamber, where, throwing herself in a chair near the window, she gave free indulgence to those painful and conflicting thoughts to which the extraordinary and bewildering events of the evening naturally gave rise.

Every word that the fearful old gipsy sybil had given utterance to recurred most vividly to her memory, and in spite of her utmost endeavours to do so, and all that her lover and his sister had said and advised upon the subject, she found it completely impossible to do away with the impression they had made upon her or to treat them with indifference.

When too she remembered the circumstances of her first meeting with the old woman, which was in the company of her betrayer, on the fatal occasion of her elopement, the warning, the predictions that she had then uttered, and which had all been fulfilled to the very letter, she could not but place some confidence in what she asserted, or half viewing her with a certain degree of awe and dread, which no argument or persuasion could stifle in her bosom.

Thus reflecting, the unhappy Phoebe sat

for some time before she could make up her mind to retire to rest, and meditation did but serve to involve her still further in fruitless conjectures, and to increase her fears and perplexity.

What a fearful mystery was there about the least observations of the sybil, the prophecy she had spoken, the warning she had so solemnly uttered. How was she to unravel it? it was impossible for her to do so, and she shuddered with horror when she thought of it. But could she treat it with scorn and derision? Ah, no, she could not, she dared not, and it was that feeling which tortured her more than all.

The window at which Phoebe which seated was standing partially open, and notwithstanding the night air was keen, her mind was too busily occupied otherways for her to think to close it.

The clouds that had before overcast the moon, now had dispersed, and she shone forth in all her usual silvery splendour, shedding a chaste and mellow radiance upon all round.

Phoebe cast a vacant glance upon the picturesque and romantic scenery, of which an almost uninterrupted view could be obtained from the window where our heroine was seated, and which at that time was rendered as clear and distinct as in the noon-day sun, but her mind was too busy to suffer her to be sensible to its beauties.

Suddenly, however, she was aroused from this lethargy of agonising thought, by observing a human form approaching the farm in a slow and stealthy manner.

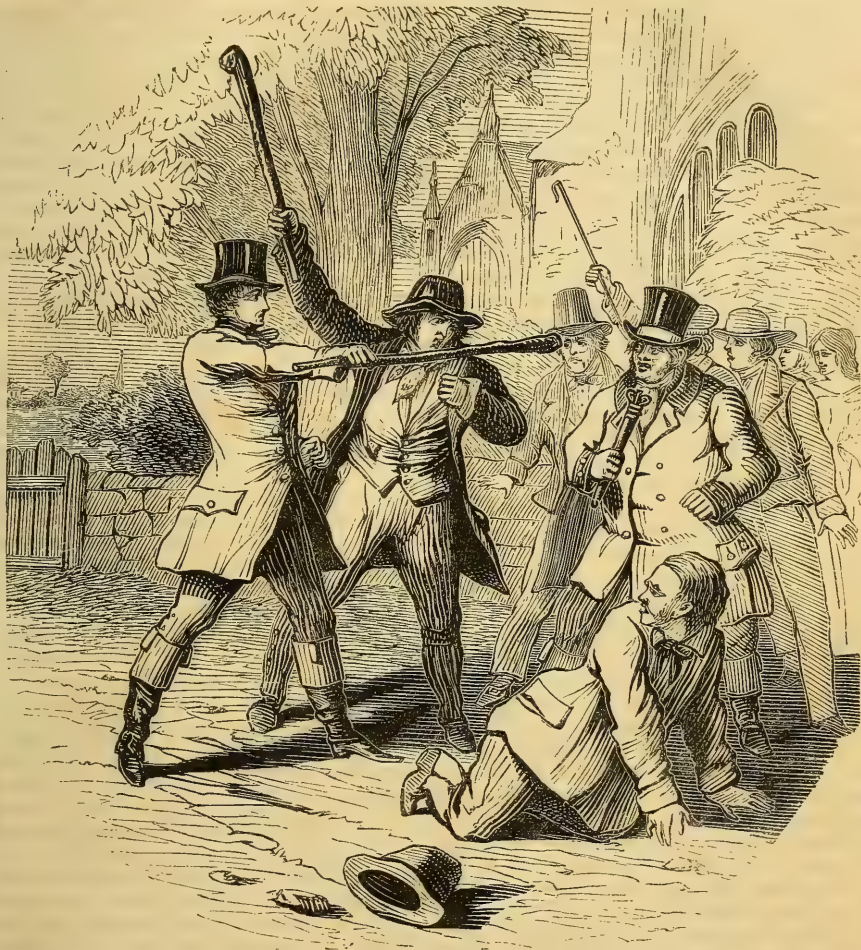
Phoebe instinctively shuddered when she beheld it, and that feeling was strengthened when on its advancing nearer she discovered it to be that of a female.

At length it came so near that she could clearly recognise it, and her agitation may be imagined when she discovered it to be the fearful and mysterious being, who then so painfully occupied all her thoughts, the gipsy sybil!

Entering the farm-yard by the side gate, the old woman advanced in the same stealthy manner towards the house, till she stood immediately underneath, and looked up at the window at which our heroine was seated.

Her repulsive and unearthly features were distinctly visible in the moonlight, and the look which she fixed full upon Phoebe, as their eyes met, made her shudder, and she could with difficulty refrain from giving utterance to an exclamation of terror, yet she found it impossible to move from her seat, or withdraw her eyes from her.

And thus in the same attitude, and with the same earnest and searching gaze, the sybil continued to stand for several minutes, without uttering a word, but expressing more



by her gestures, and then waving her long bony hand in a warning manner, she quickly retreated from the spot, and was lost to Phoebe's sight in an instant.

After gazing in the direction which the singular and fearful being had taken for a moment or two, without observing any traces of her, greatly agitated our heroine arose from her seat, hastily closed the window, and retired from it.

This second appearance of the aged gipsy that evening, and the singularity of her behaviour, did but serve to strengthen the fears and misgivings of Phoebe, and her brain was racked with all kinds of perplexing conjectures and dark suspicions.

It was some time longer before she retired to bed, and when she did so sleep was tardy in visiting her pillow.

No. 38.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

BEAUFORT AND SAM FILCHER AGAIN.

We left these worthy gentlemen at the respectable hostlerie near Hounslow Heath, then known by the interesting sign of "The Cat and Bagpipes."

Here they remained that night, and the whole of the following day, not feeling much disposed to venture forth in the open daylight, especially as the excitement caused by the daring burglary and brutal murder at Lord Selborne's was rather on the increase than by any means abating, and they could perceive from the hints thrown out in the newspapers that some clue had been obtained to the guilty parties; which

filled Beaufort with the most cowardly apprehensions, although the hardened Sam Filcher, whom no danger seemed able to intimidate treated it with his wonted bravado and cool indifference.

"Keep yer pecker up, guvner," he said, as they were seated in a waggon, driven by a man with whom Sam was acquainted, and who, as that gentleman expressed himself, 'was not nice to a shade or two,' "it's no use a funk'g over the business, coss yer see as how they've not grabbed us yet, an' no catchey no havey, as ve say in the clarsics. My maxim is this here, an' that here is, never say dead till yer is dead, an' alwus live all the presus days of yer preshus life, an' kill yer who dare?"

"Sam," said Beaufort, "I am satisfied that our career of crime and infamy will be brought to a close sooner than we anticipate, and that a terrible retribution will overtake the dreadful deed your hand so rashly and so cruelly perpetrated."

"Bah," exclaimed Sam, angrily and impatiently, "yer've alwus got that here little bit of a affair in yer mouth, an' I'm sick of a hearing yer talk about it. Who's to know as how ve had anything at all to do with it, I should like to ax yer, that is if yer don't go for to go to let the cat out of the bag by yer damned skeavishness, an' yer'd better mind vot yer'e about in that here 'spect, or I might chance to do Jack Ketch out of a customer. Yer understands me, I s'pose."

Beaufort did indeed understand him too well, and he looked at him with terror, but returned no answer, and the guilty subject dropped.

Sam Filcher had not thought it prudent to return to town after the evening on which they quitted Jarvey Bob's residence, and he being naturally of a roving disposition—as the reader has probably discovered ere now—had suggested that they should travel from place to place where they were not likely to be known, in a similar manner as that they were doing now, and enjoying themselves on the road, till such time as the excitement at the robbery and murder should have blown over, and their money become exhausted, never losing sight of "b'sness" when a good opportunity presented itself at the same time.

To the first part of this proposition Beaufort had no objection to offer, as he dreaded to return to London till the dreadful crime might be forgotten; and they having first thoroughly disguised themselves, commenced their travels with increased confidence, and a laudable determination to endeavour to drown the voice of conscience by every means it their power.

Sometimes when they found a tavern just suited to their peculiar tastes, and the object

of enjoyment blended with concealment, and where they might avoid all suspicion, which they had in view, they would take up their quarters for several days, and when they departed they never failed to leave behind them on the landlord's and his customers minds a most favourable impression as to their liberality and heartiness of spirit.

Thus about three months rolled away, and by that time such had been their reckless extravagance, that their ill-gotten money was quite exhausted, which excited the praiseworthy energy and spirit of enterprise of Mr. Sam Filcher, who was fully determined that it should be no fault of his if the exchequer remained much longer in that beggarly and deplorable condition.

With that resolution, Sam Filcher and his guilty associate might have been seen one evening in a romantic but intricate forest in a distant part of the country, on the look out for some unfortunate victim with the "requisite" about him, whose footsteps might chance to be guided that way.

Sam Filcher was evidently "up to his work," and meant "b'sness" and nothing less, looking eagerly about him, and listening attentively to catch the least sound of approaching footsteps. But the pale looks, the restless eye, the quivering lip, and trembling limbs of Beaufort plainly showed that he felt himself far from easy, and that fears of no ordinary description beset his mind.

The shadows of evening had just begun to fall around, and the wind blew keenly among the foliage of the trees, and seemed to add to the discomfort of Beaufort, though Sam Filcher took no heed of such trifling matters—as they were in his estimation—but continued to wait with a patience and perseverance which would have been beyond all praise in a better cause, passing the time away in the most agreeable and rational manner, by humming the burthen of a flash song, or whistling with all the ability of a German siffleur alternately.

The fears and misgivings of Beaufort increased, and at length unable to refrain from giving expression to them—though Filcher from the first had been a close observer of the unenviable state of mind he was in—he said—

"'Tis cold and cheerless standing here, Sam, and it does not seem likely that we shall see any one to-night that might suit our purpose. Besides, I don't feel much in the humour for the business."

"You," said Filcher, with an oath, and a look of the most supreme contempt at the same time, "yer never are in the humour when there's b'sness to be done, not never, in course not. So yer pluck, if ever yer had any, is wishaned ag'in has it? A pretty chicken-hearted cove yer air, ain't yer? vith

no more courage than a tit mouse. Bah, I'm ashamed of yer. But I'm not going away till I've had some of the ochre, an' yer must do yer share in the getting on it. I'm not a going to be gammoned out of my 'tarnashun, I can tell yer; so here, just yer take this little barker," (putting a pistol in his hand) "an' mind yer makes good use on it, if there's any 'casion, without not no nonsense, or it may be vorse for yer, mark my blessed vords."

Beaufort trembled more violently than before, and almost let the pistol fall from his hand.

"Filcher," he said, in a faltering voice, and with a look of terror, "I see that you are bent on some act of atrocity. Your determined looks convince me of it, but I will not be an accomplice in the crime of murder."

"But I say yer shall, if there's 'casion for it," returned the brutal Sam Filcher, "so there's an end of the matter. Yer can't help yerself, and hark yer I'll have not no flinching, an' damme if I find yer coming it, I'll scatter yer brains 'pon the nearest tree ve comes to; I vill, so I advise yer to mind vot yer arter."

Beaufort groaned, and trembled convulsively, for he now entertained the greatest dread of the daring and desperate miscreant Filcher, who held him in complete subjection like a child.

But an exclamation of satisfaction from Sam, quickly aroused him from this gloomy and torturing train of thought, and drew his attention to a long avenue of trees, not far from which they were standing, but at first he did not observe anything which could have excited the villains exultation.

"All right," observed Sam, "I told yer as how ve'd only got to wait patiently, an' there's no knowing vot might turn up. He's only hid for a moment behind the trees, I dare say, an' he'll soon be in sight ag'in, I'll varrant."

"What are you talking about? What do you mean?" demanded Beaufort, in an anxious but tremulous voice.

"Why the wictim wot is to be, to be sure," replied Sam, "didn't yer twig him? Yer must have been blind as a bat, if yer didn't, that here's the kevite sartin. Ah, there he is ag'in—don't yer see him now? He's a coming this here way, an' can't not 'scape us, an' not no mistake votsomdever. This here is lucky, if he's only von of the right-sort, vith plenty of the rowdy."

Beaufort looked again along the avenue, and to his dismay, knowing as he did the bloodthirsty nature of the desperate and inhuman Sam Filcher, did then behold the form of a man—who did not seem to have observed them—approaching rather quickly along the avenue.

"Let us abandon this business, ere it's too late, Sam," he said, "it is probably only some poor fellow, on the way home from his daily labour. Come, let us away."

"Vot, damned cur!" cried Filcher, with rage and contempt, "so yer'e at it ag'in, air yer? D'yer forget what I told yer? Cos, if yer does, this here p'raps may remind yer."

He pointed to the deadly weapon in his hand as he spoke, and the unhappy Beaufort trembled, but he ventured not to make any reply, for he knew very well that the villain would not fail to keep his word if he were exasperated to it.

"He's close upon us," observed Filcher, let's stand aside and watch him."

Sam laid his hand roughly on Beaufort's arm, and drew him behind the trunk of a huge oak, from which they could observe the traveller as he approached.

He soon arrived within a few yards of them, and they then discovered that he was a middle aged man, respectably dressed, and apparently belonging to the middle class of society. He paused when he came nearer the tree, behind which the two ruffians were concealed, and seemed to hesitate which way to proceed.

"He stan's well for a mark," said the heartless scoundrel Filcher in a whisper; "he couldn't not stand better; so here goes."

As he said these words, he cocked his pistol, and was about to fire at the apparently defenceless man, when Beaufort terrified grasped his arm, and arrested him in his deadly purpose.

"Bah," cried Sam, "yer'e von of the rankest mongrels as never vos. Howsomdever, I s'pose I may as well humour yer. Foller me, d'yer hear, and mind as how yer sticks to me, or I'll make a thurryfare through that damned thick skull of yourn vith a brace of bullets, an' not no mistake."

The wretched, guilty Beaufort knew he meant it, and dared not to murmur; but now was the moment of his greatest danger, and he had no other alternative than to submit to his fate whatever it might be; for he had not the courage to use the deadly weapon he held in his hand—which he might have done—against himself or Sam Filcher.

Sam, however, seemed determined to "stick close to him, and to have no flinching," for grasping his wrist, he dragged him by main force from the place of their concealment, and confronted the stranger, who started with surprise and seemed rather alarmed at the abrupt appearance, in that lonely place, and at such an hour, of two men of not the most prepossessing appearance.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

SAM FILCHER DOES BUSINESS AGAIN.

"Good evenin', sir," said the amiable Mr. Sam Filcher, politely, and addressing himself to the traveller, "good evenin', sir, an' many on 'em, yer looks fresh an' vell, I'm wery 'appy to see yer."

"What is your business with me, man?" demanded the traveller, haughtily, and eyeing Sam and Beaufort narrowly and suspiciously, "you address yourself very familiarly to me, but I do not remember ever to have seen you before."

"Praps not," said Sam; "some people is troubled with a bad mem'ry, rayther, but shoud' old kevanitance be forgut, an' nivir dragged to mind? Howsomdever, that here's no konsikens, b'sness is b'sness, so let's on to it. I jist vants to ax yer a bit of a favyer."

"What do you mean?" interrogated the stranger, sternly, "be quick, for I have no time to waste, what is your business with me?"

"Why yer see, sir," replied the insinuating Sam Filcher, "I'm a gemman of wery few words, but they are alwus to the purpose. Yer see, myself an' my pertikler friend here, has been rayther infortinat of late, an' have run ourselves to seed, so I vos jist agoin' for to ax yer, an' I hopes not no *defence*, nayther, if yer could jist lend us a poun' or two, till ve receives our diwidens."

"Scoundrel!" exclaimed the traveller, indignantly, "I understand you now, you mean robbery."

"No, no, not that here disactly," corrected Sam, coolly, "borrarin', borrhoin', that here's the perliterest vord. I'm sure now yer can't refuse so simpel an' modest a rekevest as that here."

As the villain thus impudently and sarcastically spoke these words, he exhibited his pistol, as if by accident, but significantly enough for the traveller to understand, and before Sam could be aware of his intention, he seized him by the wrist, and endeavoured to wrench the deadly weapon from his hold, but in doing so the pistol was discharged in the air, and fell into the possession of the stranger, Filcher starting back a few paces with a terrible oath, and confused and disappointed to be foiled thus adroitly in his nefarious designs by an atagonist whom measuring him by his personal appearance, he had looked upon with the most superlative contempt, as greatly his inferior.

"Damme," he said, "so yer shows yer teeth, does yer? Yer'e no gemman, so in course I can't think of treatin' yer as sich, by not no manner of means. Yer barker,

captain, since yer makes no more use of it than as if it vos a cabbich stump, yer barker, I say, an' I'll jist give our friend here a receipt in full, for vot ve may borrar of him."

He made an attempt to snatch the pistol from the hand of the terrified Beaufort, who, however, determined to prevent murder, if possible, contrived, as if by accident, also to discharge it, and the traveller then—he being rather a muscular man—watching his opportunity, closed with the consummate villain Filcher, and a desperate struggle of several minutes ensued, Sam uttering the most frightful oaths and maledictions all the while, and Beaufort standing by, and looking anxiously on, but without offering to render the least assistance.

But at length Sam contrived to press his fingers so fiercely into the throat of the stranger, that his eyes protruded from their sockets, his features became distorted, and he was nearly strangled.

The murderous ruffian then relaxed his hold, and the unfortunate man fell insensible to the earth, entirely at the mercy of the two villains, Filcher having given him two or three heavy kicks after he had fallen."

"Vell," he said, "that here job's jobbed; he's keviet enuff now, tho' he gave me a good deal more trouble than I bargained, for. He vos a plucked un, an' no mistake. As for you, yer infernal cur, I've a damned good mind to serve yer the same as him."

Beaufort trembled, but in the present humour of Sam Filcher he dared not to make any reply, and Sam kneeling down, commenced rifling the insensible man's pockets of their contents, having first secured his watch, and breast pin, and a couple of valuable rings from his finger.

"Brayvo, old chap," he said, weighing a well filled purse in his hand, "yer'e a jolly good trump, an' not no mistake, yer bleeds much more freely than I thought yer would, an' I 'spec's yer for it, an' forgive's yer for hinsultin' me. A out an' out ticker, a couple of unkinmin fine fawnies, an' a purse full of the right sort of sugar. That here's vot I calls cumin' out bansom.' I s'pose, mongrel, as how yer'll 'spect to go vhaacks in this here haul, tho' yer lent no hand in the b'sness, an' yer don't desearve a soskin. Vell, ve'll see how yer behaves. Kim along, ve may as vell make ourselves scarce, in case them here damned pistils should have 'larm'd any von vith their barkin'. This here vay, the gemman vill sleep keviet enuff for a 'our or so, I dare say."

Thus eloquently and elegantly delivering himself, Filcher hastily but carefully deposited the booty in his pockets, very well satisfied with his night's work, and he and Beaufort, who was glad to escape from the

scene of the robbery, and the contemplation of the insensible man, plunged into the thickest of the wood, Sam leading the way.

Now it fortunately happened—or the unfortunate traveller, left there exposed, without any assistance being rendered towards his recovery might otherwise have perished—that shortly after the two villains had taken their abrupt departure from the scene of the outrage and robbery, several labouring men on their way home from their daily toil, had occasion to pass the spot, when the foot of one of them came in contact with the prostrate man and he partly stumbled over him, which led to the discovery, and raising him from the ground, and finding that he still lived, they first endeavoured to recal him to his senses, but failing in that, prompted by every feeling of humanity, they conveyed him without delay to the nearest public-house, which happened to be at no great distance, on the borders of the wood, and where they knew the necessary assistance could be obtained for his recovery.

Here every attention was paid him, a medical gentleman promptly called in, and after some time, by great care and exertion, he revived sufficiently to give an account of the manner in which the outrage was committed, and the robbery effected, together to give a minute description of the persons and features of the robbers, at the same time offering to pay a handsome reward for their apprehension and being brought to justice, Sam Filcher, with all his sagacity, having in his hurry, missed a pocket-book, containing a large sum of money in Bank of England notes.

Information of the robbery was immediately forwarded to the magistrates, and prompt measures taken for the pursuit and capture of the villains, if possible.

The gentleman, however, was too severely, although not dangerously injured, to be able to leave the house to which he had been conveyed, for two or three days.

Sam Filcher and his alarmed associate hurried through the wood at the top of their speed, though they knew not the way they should go for safety, or where they might find a place of accommodation till the morning without fear of detection.

As they proceeded, Sam aroused himself by abusing Beaufort to the best of his ability, for the cowardice he had displayed on this, as well as most other occasions, of equal importance, and it is only due to Beaufort to state that he took it all in pretty good part, for the best of all reasons, namely, that he was afraid to retaliate or to recriminate, having so reckless and desperate a ruffian to deal with.

"Damme," said Filcher, "if sich a feller, sich a chicken-hearted 'umbug as yer air, is

vorth salt, an' I, the Sprig of Myrtle, he as fit the cellybrayted Hookem Snivey, isn't almost 'shamed to keep yer comp'ny. Yer gets vorserer an' vorserer every 'our, an' vot d'yer 'spec vill com' of yer, if yer continuys to go on at this here 'plorable rate? vy, yer kariter vill be damned to a dead sartinty, an' not no mistake, an' then yer'll be ruined, that's vot yer vill. It's keвите shockin' to think of it, an' I blushes for yer."

To this sensible, feeling, and moral lecture Beaufort made no reply, thus by silence giving his marked and decided assent to the truth of it, and Mr. Sam Filcher, after a brief pause to recover from his emotion, thus continued:—

"A pretty slice of luck yer'd have missed this here blessed night as nivr vos, if yer'd hav' had it all yer own way, yer'd hav' let this here gemman have gone away with all this walibel property in his purseshun, at the same time as ve wanted it so bad. Shameful, disgraceful. But I say, my run un, a vord in yer ear, an' which may act as a corshun to yer in future, if I vos sure as it vos not a haxidens, but yer fired hof that here preshus pistil of yourn a purpose, I'd take 'med'ate an' sartin steps to purwent yer nivr ag'in a playing sich tricks in futur."

"Sam," said Beaufort in reply, not for the first time venturing to speak, and that very timidly, "it is more than probable that you have again committed murder, so rest satisfied."

"Stuff," returned Filcher, "I've only sent the gemman to sleep for awhile, an' that here vos kind of me. But kim along, its no use a talking to yer, I shall nivr be able to make not nuffin' of yer."

Beaufort was glad that Sam declined the honour of any further conversation with him for the present, for he had listened to every word he had uttered with the greatest disgust and repugnance, and relapsing into silence they again hurried on their way.

A storm had been long gathering, and it now commenced in earnest, so that it rendered them the more anxious to find some place of shelter, but where no suspicion might be excited as to their real character.

The war of elements increased in violence every moment, and, as Sam Filcher felt extremely unwell in consequence of the want of something to moisten his throat, and had been cursing most lustily the non-enterprising and anti-speculative builders for neglecting to erect a tavern or two on so eligible a site, the prospect of a drenching to the skin before he could meet with a place of refuge and where he could obtain all that was necessary for the inward man, did not serve to ameliorate the sourness and asperity of that truly amiable and intellectual gentleman's temper.

Added to this the wood appeared interminable, for, in his hurry to escape from the scene of the robbery, and his not being very well acquainted with the place, Filcher had taken the longest way, and knew not how to alter it now that he discovered they were in such a dilemma.

"It's all yer fault," he observed surlily to Beaufort, "with yer dunned rhining, an' fear, an' nonsense, has unnarved me, an' put me off my guard where I vos a going. I shall choke presently jist for the vant of summat to drink, an' here ve may vander about for a blessed month of blessed Sundays. Curse yer."

Beaufort knew it was useless to remonstrate, and he therefore bore the reproaches of Sam with great humility, fortitude, patience, and Christian forbearance.

At length they emerged from the wood, and then entered upon a dreary heath, or wild moor, where their situation was even worse than before, as there was not a tree or anything else to shelter them in the least from the pelting rain, and again Sam Filcher indulged himself in a volley of oaths and abuse against the weather, the country, and the unhappy Beaufort in particular.

And thus the two villains continued to travel for more than another half hour, until they were both in the most uncomfortable plight which can well be imagined.

But suddenly, as they approached the end of the moor, they beheld a light glimmering at a short distance as if proceeding from the window of some habitation, and a most welcome sight it was indeed to them.

"All right at last, by Jew-peter," exclaimed Sam, in accents of joy, "I only hopes as that here preshus light comes from some lush crib, that's all; von't I not go into the dog's nose, nayther. Kim along, captain, jist put yer best leg fust, vill yer, for there's no time to lose."

Beaufort did put both his best legs first, for he felt most wet, cold, and uncomfortable, and was anxious for a place of shelter, a glass of something hot and strong, and the blessing of a chertul and blazing fire.

They were quickly across the dreary moor, and entered upon a bye-road, which, however, led to a village, and, guided by the light, they at length stopped before the door of a homely and comfortable looking roadside inn.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE CAPTURE.

"Jolly good luck to the landlord of this here crib," said Sam Filcher, in delighted

tones of the most unbounded eulogy; "he's a trump, I knows, an not no mistake by the wery fleckshun of that here roaring fire vot is a blazing inside. Kim along, captain, no hezytayshun, a pot or two of gutter an' a few drops of the creetur, an' ve shall soon be able to pull ourselves together ag'in."

"There's no danger, is there, think you?" interrogated Beaufort, cautiously, and in an under tone.

"Danger be damned," replied Sam, scornfully and indignantly, "yer'e alwus a thinking 'bout that here. Vot have ve got to fear? Who's to know us? Kim along, I say."

Beaufort offered no further remark, but followed Sam into the house, and finding no one to oppose them, he led the way into the room from whence the reflection of the blazing fire proceeded, as unceremoniously as if he had been a constant frequenter of the same apartment for the last twenty years, and immediately seated himself in one of the snug chimney corners, Beaufort, without any more ceremony, taking the other.

"Ah," remarked Sam, looking round the room with an eye of satisfaction and admiration, "this here's summat like—this here is prime. Now for a tight'ner, summat to drink, an a pipe or two of bacey, an ve shall be all right."

To all this Beaufort could not find it in his heart to raise the least objection, and Sam having rang the bell, the worthy host, who was a good-humoured, jovial-looking old man, entered the room, and having received Mr. Filcher's rather extensive order with much civility, hastened to complete it, and soon returned with what had been demanded, to which Sam and his friend prepared without any more delay to do full justice.

After a light meal of about two pounds of meat, with vegetables to correspond, and further washing down the same with half a gallon of mild London porter, and half a pint of rum, Sam declared himself better, and expressed the most sanguine hopes and expectations that with the aid of two or three more pots of beer, some of the landlord's choice spirits, and a few pipes of tobacco, himself and his friend might do for the next half hour or so, and having ascertained from the landlord that they could be accommodated for the night in a double-bedded room, Sam and his associate in crime "went to work" in real earnest.

"Vell," remarked Sam, who now once more began to find himself in one of his happiest veins, "this is vot I call a doing the thing all to rights. Ve couldn't not have been haycommydated better if ve had been the rankest svelis as never vos. I say, captain, how's yer complaint now?"

Beaufort, in spite of the good things of which he had so freely partaken and was still partaking, did not feel himself altogether "to rights," as Filcher expressed it, but fearful of ruffling the gentle temper of his respectable companion again, by offering to differ from him in opinion, he returned a brief but favourable answer to his inquiry, and with which Sam appeared to be perfectly satisfied.

"Ah, that here's the ticket, captain," he said, approvingly, "an' now yer begins to look something like yerself ag'in. Vot's the use of being molloncholy vhen there's nuffin to fret about; an' vot's the use of crying I should like to know vhen yer hasn't got a blessed thing to sell. Kim, my toolup, let's lush away for an 'our or so, and then v'e'll retire to our virtuous bug-valks for a bit of a snooze."

Being in this happy state of mind, our truly respectable friend re-commenced "operashuns," with a spirit, gusto, and perseverance that would certainly have been worthy of emulation and imitation under different and more commendable circumstances, and Beaufort, probably from the wish to humour him, but still more probable from the cowardly fear of offending him, neither raised any objections to his propositions, or refused practically to participate in them.

They drank, they smoked, they sang, they joked, they laughed together, and all in perfect good humour, until Mr. Sam Filcher began to perceive that there were two scoundrel Beaufort's in the room, and the latter worthy not only fancied that two, or two dozen Sam Filcher's were present, and standing fantastically on their heads, but that every article of furniture in the apartment were performing a grotesque ballet, the chairs, tables, grate, tongues, shovel, poker, everything taking a most active part in the same, while the chimney ornaments were grinning from the chimney looking-glass, which—by some strange freak, for which the rather heated and unsettled state of Mr. Beaufort's brain at the time, can probably only account—had shifted its quarters to the ceiling, and looking down upon the performers and performances with evident delight and amusement.

Matters having arrived at this remarkable point, Mr. Sam Filcher, with an oath, an hiccup, and a sleepy yawn, suggested that it "vos time to call a go," in which proposition Mr. or rather our *soi dissant* Captain Beaufort having perfectly coincided, the "go" was called for, and kindly responded to by the worthy landlord, who, with the assistance of two of his strongest male servants, escorted them to their sleeping room, they as all gentlemen do who love money, scorning to pay, or even intending to pay their score.

They snored all night, and quietly walked out of the house in which they had been so hospitably entertained by daybreak the following morning, leaving the worthy host to settle their account "with himself," in the best manner he might, Sam Filcher very shrewdly observing to his associate in villany, that "it vos a bore vvhich gemmen couldn't put up vith, to be axed for an' pay for any score, an' 'specially seeing as how the ocre vould be verry handy on some futur' 'casion."

They passed through the village, near which the inn, in which they had been so well accommodated, was situated, and having walked to some little distance, where there was a pleasant spot, with the green grass looking refreshing and inviting, and the first beams of the morning sun smiling down upon them (oh, that such miscreants should ever receive its genial benefit) and seeing no person about to observe them, Sam Filcher seated himself upon a mound of earth, inviting Beaufort to follow his example, and then commenced "overhauling"—as he figuratively expressed it—the booty which he had plundered from the traveller, Beaufort being a passive and not uninterested observer of the same.

"Capital ticker this," remarked Sam, eyeing the purloined watch with much satisfaction and admiration, "and fust rate bunch of inguns, an' all other 'pendages, don't yer call 'em. Wery kind of the gemmen, verry kind indeed, I takes it of him, to carry this here partikel 'bout him for the use an' 'commodashun of any other gemman as is hard up. Jist the verry hidentikel thing as I wanted, an' not no mistake. As for the fawneys an' the breast pin, I vouldn't take not no less than fifty quid for 'em, or I'll eat 'em. Now then," he added, after a brief pause, and taking the purse from his pocket, "having settled that here little piece of b'sness to our mutiwl sat'sfacshun, I hopes and trusts, vith yer permishun, captain, I'll jist tite the walee of this here puss an' its contints."

He emptied the golden horde to the ground, as though it had been so much dust, and commenced counting it, which, he being not one of the best arithmetician's in the world, in order to satisfy himself that he was "all right," was compelled to do two or three times over, and he was evidently much gratified with the result.

"A cool fifty yeller boys, by Jew-peter," he exclaimed, "vvhich, in 'dition to the turnip an' 'inguns, I considers verry han'some, verry han'some indeed. Brayvo, old chap, may yer live for never. I say, guvner, this here vill carry us on a little vvhile longer, eh?"

Beaufort returned no verbal answer to this, but his looks expressed his assent, and

Sam proceeded with his investigation, taking the pocket-book from that part of his dress where he had deposited it.

"Last, not least, I hopes," he said, "is this here, a wery nice lookin' book, an' I shouldn't at all vonder now if it av'n't got some good leaves in it. Let's see, von twenty, come, that here's not so bad to begin vith, now then, ten—ten—twenty—ten—ten five—five—five—fi—oh, blessed if I isn't flabbergasted. Here's a slice of luck, captain, never yer don't say not never no more, as the Sprig of Myrtle, an' the pride of Vestminster, him as fit Hookem Snivey, isn't not up to his vork. Oh, gemini! von't ve not have a go in, now?"

"Put away the money, Filcher," said Beaufort, half satisfied, half afraid, "and let us begone. The sooner we are far away from the neighbourhood of the robbery, if it is nothing worse, the better, for no doubt it will make a great stir."

"There," said Sam impatiently and contemptuously, "yer funkin' ag'in air yer? There's not no pleasin' of yer not any how, no, not votsomdever, even when ve have got a good haul. I'm sure yer ought to feel much 'bleeged to the gemman for bein' so lib'ral to us, but there's no gratitude in yer. Bah! I scorns sich a feller!"

Having thus properly expressed his indignant feelin's, the moralising thief, carefully re-deposited the ill-gotten money in his pocket, looking at Beaufort with the most marked expression of contempt at the same time.

"Now then, let's step it," he said, as he rose from the place on which he had been seated, "its a wery fine mornin' arter the rain last night, an' the walk vill guv us a happytite for breakfast. Hollo! there's some von kimmin, it might be the old landlord kimming for the settlement of his little bill, an' as that here wouldn't not be disac'ly convenient, vhy ve may as vell make ourselves scarce."

Beaufort was by no means disinclined to follow his companion's advice, especially as at that moment he perceived coming from the direction of the village which they had so recently quitted and who seeming to observe them, quickened their pace, as if they wished to get up to them, several men.

"I don't half like the appearance of these men," said Beaufort: "come Sam let us be quick."

"Don't yer go for to hurry or flurry any mother's son," returned Filcher, with his usual coolness, "I'm in not no hurry, an' the doctor pertikly rekevests as how I shall not be disturbed, on not no account votsomdever. Asides, vot's there to fear?"

"Everything, I'm inclined to think," answered Beaufort, "see, those men have

quickened their pace, and are evidently hastening towards us. Come, Sam, don't be obstinate."

"And who is hobstinet, spooney?" politely returned Filcher; "damn 'em, vot can they vant vith us? Kim along vith yer, an' mind this here if they should overtake us, an' show their teeth, vhy ve must show 'em as they haven't got two blessed babby's to deal vith. D'yer hear?"

Beaufort did hear, but having no particular wish to display his prowess in the manner indicated by Filcher, he urged him again to depart as quickly as possible, with which request—as his own suspicions were now excited—he complied, and turning round the foot of the hill near which they had been seated, they hurried on as fast as they possibly could.

But, as they proceeded they could hear the shouts of the men, which satisfied the villains that the suspicions were not altogether groundless, and even the redoubtable Mr. Sam Filcher could not very well conceal some signs of fear, for, as he justly observed, if they meant anything, they be one or two too many even for the Sprig of Myrtle, he settling Beaufort down as a mere dummy, or cipher.

"Vot a thing it is," he observed, in tones of resentment and disgust, "that gemmen can't do b'sness vithout being hinteruptid an' 'sturbed by every vulgar blackguard. Damn 'em, vot do they vant vith us? Why the devil don't they mind their own b'sness? Wheugh, here they come, they mean's mischief, sure enuff, an' ve vere foolish enuff to leave our pistils behind us."

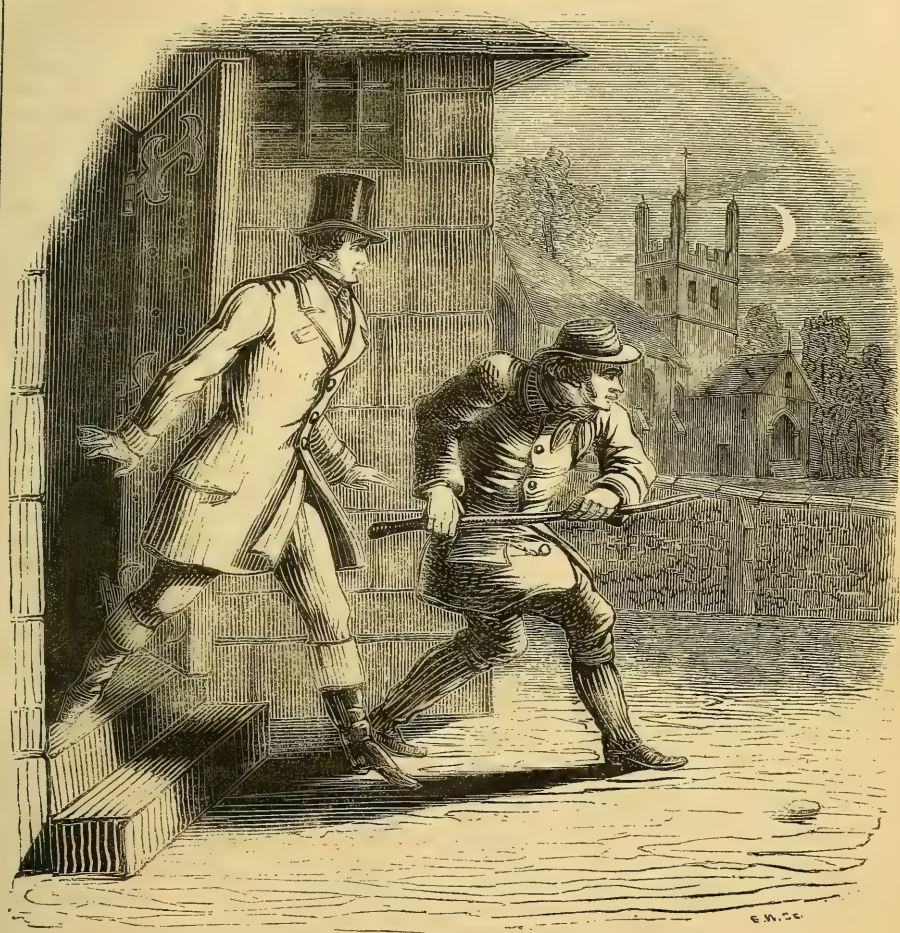
The men were not only coming, but were gaining fast upon them, and there could no longer be the least shadow of a doubt that, as Sam had observed, "they meant mischief."

Beaufort was terribly alarmed, for he now gave himself up for lost, the number of the men convincing him that resistance would be useless.

Not so, however, exactly thought Sam Filcher, and he therefore prepared himself for action.

"There," he said, making a stand, and getting himself into fighting attitude; "I never turned tail yet, an' damme if I'm a goin. to do so now. Let 'em come on, a dozen on 'em, a skevore on 'em, if they likes, they shall find as how the ould Sprig of Myrtle isn't not lik'd out of time yet. Now, captain," he added sarcastically, "vot air yer trembling about, like alump of convulsed jelly? Only jist yer stand behind me, an' I'll partect yer, like a cock. Vhy, there's only seven on 'em, that's all. That's nuffin!"

Sam looked upon that number of individuals with perfect contempt—now that he



had pulled himself together a bit, as he said, as being in his opinion no match for him, and meant "goin' in to vin;" and Beaufort finding that it was no use showing the white feather, prepared himself to do his best, although he well knew that resistance would be very little short of madness.

The villagers (among whom were the men who had discovered the unfortunate traveller), now came up to them, and made a full stop, looking earnestly and narrowly at Filcher and Beaufort, the former of whom met their looks with the greatest coolness and most impudent daring.

"Good mornin' to yer, my buttereups," he said, politely;—"I hopes as how yere' all in a purfiet state ov converlyhissince. To vot may I *distribut* the hextreame 'onner

ov this visit?—Is there any partikler favyer yer wishes to ax me, cos if there is, vhy, yer may as well consider it granted."

"That's one of the scoundrels, I'll swear, by the gentleman's description," said one of the men;—"gallows-looking features, Newgate drops, flash dress, and ——"

"Stop, stop, old feller," interrupted Sam; "that here's a very purty scripshun ov my persnal charms, I must say; but I don't disac'ly admire it."

"What's your business?" demanded Beaufort, sternly.

"That's the other villain too," remarked the man who had before spoken; "seize them."

"Hold hard, my flowers," said Sam; "that here's easier said than done. If that here's yer game I'm vith yer. Yer'll find

as how yer haven't not got no kitten to deal vith in ould Sam Filcher. Come on, all ov yer,—the more the merrier;—von, two, three, and yer eye's out."

Thus saying, the redoubtable Sam lost no time in suiting the action to the word, and dealt his blows about him right and left so lustily, that the rustics soon discovered, as the hero himself had intimated, that they had an awkward customer to deal with, and that the capture could not be made without some, and pretty considerable damage to themselves.

Beaufort also, seeing the necessity of the case, and dreading the idea of a prison, fought resolutely, and with a scientific skill, which afterwards drew forth the warm eulogiums of the Sprig of Myrtle.

The villagers for some minutes only came up to be knocked down,—and the two villains, in spite of the unequal numbers they had to contend against, seemed not at all unlikely to come off victorious;—but the villagers seeing this, and ashamed to suffer such a cowardly defeat, surrounded and closed upon them in a body, so that they were thus completely overpowered,—and their arms having been pinioned with cords, they were dragged, or rather carried to the house of the nearest magistrate, where they were searched, and the whole of the property of which they had robbed the gentleman found upon them.

Having undergone a strict examination before the magistrate, Mr. Sam Filcher defended himself with true professional ability, and with remarkable éloquence, but Beaufort being too much dismayed at the gloomy prospect before him to utter scarcely a word, they were remanded to the cage, or lock-up house, close by, till such time as the plaintiff had sufficiently recovered from the injuries he had received to give evidence against them.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE CAGE.

"VELL," said Sam, when he and Filcher were thus left alone to their meditations, "here ve is, Captain, as snugly an' as safely lodged as any two gentlemen need vish to be, only vith this here difference, as I don't spose they'll let us walk out to take the benefit ov the fresh air vhen ve likes. They von't not have any respect for the liberty ov the subject, I reckon. It's damned pervokin', too, to think arter all the trouble ve had taken, that ve should thus thus lose the svag. It almost breaks

my preshus heart to think ov it. Howsomdever, nivr say dead till yer is dead, an' so I'm not a goin' to be down on my luck. Now, Captain, vot the devil's the matter vith yer?—yer looks as dull as if some great misfortin had happen'd to yer. There's not nuffin pertikler broke yet, so yer needn't cry about it."

"Sam," said Beaufort, in a gloomy voice, "we are fairly caught at last, and our situation is too miserable and dangerous a one to form the subjects of your vulgar jests, and mock bravado. It is quite evident that our guilty career is fast drawing to a close."

"Psha!" exclaimed Sam, angrily and impatiently,—“yer'e a fool an' a cur, as I've often told you afore. Ve sha'n't be topp'd yet, yer may take yer solim davey ov that here, an' not no mistake, so vot's the use ov funkin' about it. I wouldn't have cared a single curse, if they hadn't taken the rowdy from us. Howsomever, vorse luck now, better another time. Vot d'yer say to a song, Captain, just to pass the time away!"

Beaufort looked at the hardened scoundrel with astonishment and disgust as he replied:

"Filcher, this conduct ill becomes you, situated as we are, and with the certainty of an ignominious fate before our eyes."

"Stuff," returned Sam Filcher, contemptuously, "there's not no cause to fear, vot-somdever, if yer only keeps yer pluck up, and don't speak too much ov yer mind afore the beak. I tells yer ag'in that our time's not come yet, an' it strikes me very forcibly that ve shall be found missin' afore that here preshus beak can have the pleasure ov seein' us ag'in."

"Impossible!"

"But I tells yer it's not impossible," returned Sam Filcher, positively, "there's not nuffin in the world that's unposibel to Sam Filcher, an' he's not a goin' to be taken in an' done for in this here vay, yer may take his blessed vord for it. Only just wait till its dark, an' then I'll commence operashuns."

"What do you mean?" inquired Beaufort, eagerly.

"Vot I say, to be sure," answered Sam; "I've made up my mind not to stop in this place on any account votsomdever, arter dark."

"Nonsense; we can't help ourselves."

"But I say ve can."

"How?"

"By valkin' away to be sure."

"You must be mad, Sam, to talk in this manner," said Beaufort. "They got us too securely in this confounded place for that."

"Vell," replied Filcher, "ve shall see when the time comes. But if that here old beak ever ag'in claps his preshus eyes on my lovely face, I'm very much mistake'n; wery."

"I do not understand you."

"Praps not; but yer may be sure as how I'll keep my vord, an' not no mistake. Only yer keep up yer pluck, an' ve shall be as right as a trivit. Now then for a bit ov a chaunt."

Having thus spoken, the worthy Mr. Sam Filcher to show his supreme contempt for his present confined situation, and his perfect confidence in the success of the design to escape which he had in contemplation, at once proceeded to humming, and continuing it with much spirit, and his usual musical ability till he was fairly worn out, and red as a chimney pot in the face with his exertions, and was compelled for a time to rest himself.

But Beaufort still remained in the same depressed state of mind; and all the vocal talent of his accomplished, facetious friend and companion Filcher, failed to arouse him from it. All the crimes that they had committed, he now too firmly believed, would be laid to their charge;—it was impossible that they could escape conviction, and he shuddered with horror and every cowardly feeling at the thoughts of the ignominious fate which too surely awaited them.

"Now, Captain," said Filcher, after watching him narrowly for some time, and with a look of contempt;—"yer'er down on yer preshus luck ag'in I see. Vot a fellow yer am to fret about trifles. Vy any von to look upon yer, would s'pose as how yer'd been tried an' convicted, and vos only vaitin' for the perlite attentions of Mr. Jack Ketch. There don't be a lookin' for all the world like a dyin' donkey, but keep yer pecker up as I does."

"Sam," returned Beaufort, "you may affect to treat our present situation with indifference, but I am convinced that your real feelings are very different, cleverly even as you contrive to conceal them."

"Feelin's be dammed," said Sam, "they don't nivir trouble me, I leaves em all for sich thorough rank curs as yerself, an' I vishes yer luck with em. I hopes to drink many a pot ov pongelow yet, an' no mistake. As soon as it's dark, an' there is not likely to be any von about to disturb me, my name's Valker, an' if yer don't like to follow me, vy yer can stay here an' take the konsekens, that's all?"

"You're flattering yourself with vain and delusive hopes," said Beaufort; "how can we possibly escape from this place?"

"Easily enuff," replied Sam; yer sees that ere vinder, doesn't yer."

"To be sure I do, and what of that? It's strongly barred."

"I knows that; but if Sam Filcher is not strong enuff with a little ov yer help to wrench von o' them here bar's out, tis a pity."

"And what then?"

"Vot then,—why yer'll see when the times comes," answered Sam.

"It is a mad project," observed Beaufort, "and cannot succeed."

"But I tell yer it shall, it must," replied Sam Filcher, determinedly; "I'm not goin' to wait to be tucked up afore my time, I can tell yer. Come, Captain, no more ov yer driv'lin' nonsense, if yer please, but be ready to haet with courage when I shall vant yer."

Beaufort returned no answer, but he could not encourage the sanguine expectations which his guilty companion evidently indulged in, and every moment his cowardly fears and dismal forebodings increased.

As for Mr. Sam Filcher he having sufficiently rested himself resumed his harmony, which he continued with very little intermission during the remainder of the day, varying the entertainment occasionally with a flash dance, and accompanying himself with a whistle.

They were only visited once during the day by the turnkey to see that they were all secure, and to bring them provisions, and Sam imagining that they were now perfectly safe from further interruption, awaited the time when he had resolved to make the attempt to escape with impatience, and endeavouring, but with very little success, to arouse Beaufort from the gloomy state of meditation, in which, ever since their apprehension, he had been wrapped.

The place in which the villains were temporarily confined, was very ill adapted to its purpose, and seemed to be by no means unfavourable to the successful result of Sam Filcher's designs.

It was on the ground floor with one small window barred, but the door looked as though it would not be very difficult to burst open, notwithstanding it was properly secured on the outside. It also stood apart from any other building, the turnkey, who was also the parish beadle, and occasionally the parish clerk also, residing in a cottage some short distance off; so that it will be seen that proper arrangements for the security of two such desperate criminals could scarcely have been worse attended to.

Night came at last, a fine moonlight

night, which was not exactly in unison with Sam Filcher's wishes, who would have preferred complete darkness for his work; however, he determined that that should present no obstacle to the execution of his designs.

He wanted a couple of hours longer, however, before he commenced his task, thinking that then it was less likely that any one might be about to observe them and offer any obstruction; and Beaufort felt anxious for the result, though he could not yet bring his mind to anticipate a favourable one.

"Now Captain," said Sam, at length, "if yer don't muster up resolution, an' giv' me yer best help in this here b'sness, vhy yer no man, an' deserves to stay here an' be damned. As for me, I means to be far away from this here place afore the mornin'."

"You seem to be most sanguine in your expectations, Filcher," returned Beaufort; "but I cannot perceive what cause you have to be so."

"In course you don't," replied Filcher, contemptuously; "an that here's because yer've got not no gumption about yer, I s'pose yer'll have pluck enough to valk out ov this here cursed hole vhen the door's opened for yer. Bah! I vouldn't give not so much as a bad ha'p'ny for sich a chicken hearted feller."

Beaufort bore with the taunts and reproaches of Sam Filcher in the best manner he could, for he knew that any reply from him would only serve to irritate his amiable temper, and he had no other alternative but to submit to his will, and obey his instructions, or rather orders whatever they might be.

"All's keviet," said Sam, at last, rising from his seat with a look of determination,—"so now for b'sness."

He took a knife from his pocket, and first attempted with it to force the lock from the door, but it baffled all his skill to do so.

"That's no go," he observed;—"no matter, I think as how I can soon find summat as vill answer my purpose, so here goes."

He mounted the chair and looked from the window to see whether or not there was any one about.

"All right," he said, "there's no von to hobserve us or to hinterrupt us, so I can go to vork like von o'clock."

He tried the different bars of the window, and found one so loose that it would require no great effort of strength to remove it, and after a short time he succeeded in doing so, Beaufort watching him with no

little anxiety and curiosity all the time. He then descended from the chair, and commenced hammering away at the lock of the door with the iron bar, with the vigour of a blacksmith, and making a noise which alarmed Beaufort, as he thought they were sure to be detected.

Sam, however, now that he had commenced "operashuns," was not to be daunted or disheartened in the good work, and continued to hammer away at the lock till he had forced it off, and he then began a desperate attack on the door, which proved to be a much more formidable obstacle than he had at first bargained for or anticipated, and drew from him frequent oaths as he proceeded.

He was not to be defeated, however, but continued his exertions with redoubled vigour, and Beaufort standing by and looking on all the time, without being able to render the least assistance.

The labours of the industrious Sam were at length rewarded, the door yielding to his repeated heavy blows, at last flew back upon its hinges, and there was no further impediment to the liberty of the villains, and as far as they could see, there was no person about to obstruct them in their flight.

So sudden had been the success of Filcher's resolute design, and to Beaufort so totally unexpected, that he could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses, and gazed at the shattered and open door, and the romantic scenery beyond, glittering in the moonlight, with looks of stupified amazement.

But Sam Filcher quickly aroused him into action, and laying hold of his arm, said: "Now vot the devil are yer standin' gapin' there for, like some preshus idiwet?—I told yer how it'd be, an' that I didn't mean to accept o' this here lodgin' free gratist for nuffin, not no longer than I liked, an' yer see as I alwus does, I have kept my word. Them roads afore us, there's not no von to pay their respects to us, so the sooner ve steps it the better."

Beaufort could raise no reasonable objection to this proposition, and they, having again cast an inquiring glance around without seeing anything to excite their alarm, walked hastily from the place in which they had been confined, they made their way to a long narrow lane, which led to the uninhabited part of the country, and where they were less likely to meet with anyone who might suspect them, and seek to obstruct them.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE FURTHER PROCEEDINGS OF BEAUFORT
AND SAM FILCHER.

It was now about ten o'clock, and the night was so beautifully fine, that it was quite a treat to walk in its refreshing coolness, and beneath the brilliant light of the heavenly lamp, and the innumerable twinkling stars.

But Sam Filcher and Beaufort had no taste or admiration for the beauties of Nature; and, even if they had, their minds were at that time too busily occupied, and they were too anxiously engaged in escaping from the neighbourhood as quickly as possible to suffer them to take any notice of them.

Every step they took, and which led them still further from the place of their late incarceration, afforded greater relief and satisfaction to the mind of the guilty Beaufort, who could scarcely believe that he was again breathing the air of liberty; and he could not now help feeling something like gratitude to Sam Filcher for the task he had so cleverly and successfully accomplished.

Beaufort had in fact given himself entirely up to despair, and had not unreasonably on the apprehension of himself and Filcher, fully made up his mind that his doom was sealed, and that an ignominious death upon the gallows was inevitable; and this sudden and unexpected deliverance, (for the present at any rate), from so awful and revolting a fate, so excited him that he could not without difficulty contain himself within the bounds of reason.

Sam Filcher, however, took it quite coolly as usual, and as a mere matter of business, but continued his flight, by the most unfrequented way, with unabated speed, hurrying Beaufort along with him, and keeping a sharp look out to see that no danger threatened.

And in this manner they proceeded for some time, and until they had got to a considerable distance, when they ventured to slacken their pace, as they considered that they had got beyond the reach of immediate danger.

"Vot d'yer think of it now, Captain?" interrogated Sam, with a look of self-satisfaction and exultation;—"don't yer think as how I've done this here little bit ov a job in a workman like manner?"

Beaufort replied in the affirmative, and could not refrain from congratulating and highly complimenting Sam Filcher.

"Ah! leave the ould Sprig ov Myrtle alone for b'sness," remarked Sam, "he's no greenhorn to be caught snoozing when he ought up an' doin'. My eyes,—von't they be stunn'd when they goes to wisit that here preshus cage ag'in, an' they finds as how the two pretty birds they had coteched is flown, hopp'd the tvigs, ham-pitayed their timber, made 'emselfes scarce, hook'd it, eh?—Ha; ha! ha!—it's a devilish good joke, ha! ha! ha!"

And Sam in order to give full vent to his joyful feelings on the occasion, indulged himself with a most uproarious fit of laughter, until the veins on his forehead swelled to an enormous size, and his sides were ready to crack.

"It would be as well not to make too sure of our ultimately escaping, Filcher," remarked Beaufort, "lest we should be disappointed. No doubt when our flight is discovered, an immediate pursuit will be set on foot, and every means taken for our re-capture.

"Bah!" said Sam, impatiently, "there yer air, a croakin' ag'in as usual, an' a meetin' ov troubles half. I never know'd sich a preshus old 'oman in my life as yer air, an' it keville disgusts me to hear yer. Let 'em pursue us an' be damned, if they like, they vill be puzzled to diskiver us I'm a thinkin', for ve should be fur enuff away before the mornin'."

"We are now without money," said Beaufort.

"No ve ar'n't," laconically replied Sam.

"How," said Beaufort, with a look of surprise and incredulity,—“did they not search us and take from us the whole of the booty?”

"Valker!" replied the sagacious Sam, significantly. "D'yer think Sam Filcher vos a goin' to be done in that here vay?"

"What do you mean?"

"Vhy, this is vot I mean," answered Sam, "vith all their cunning, they jist miss'd my baccy box, or else they thought as how it vos not worth takin'. Oh gemini! vosn't they not preshus flats for that here? for, under the baccy I had jist snugly stowed away ten golden guineas, an' three ten p'un' notes. Ha! ha! ha! ho! ho! ho! vot a start;—I shall bust at the thought!—Ha! ha! ha!"

And Sam Filcher again rent the air with his loud laughter, till the tears ran from his eyes, and Beaufort, pleased to find that they were not in the destitute state that he had apprehended, could not help joining him in the expression of his mirth, and again passed a warm eulogium on his wit and sagacity.

"Yes," said Sam, "they must get up

partikly early in the morning to get the best of the Sprig ov Myrtle and the Pride ov Vestminster. So yer see, Captain, as how ve arn't not kerrite smashed up yet, an' ve has got enuff to carry on vith for a week or two yet. Lor, lor, vot would yer do without me?—I'm yer gardin' hangil; I'm as good as a father an' mother to yer, I am, and yer ought to revere me for it, that here's vot yer ought."

Beaufort solemnly assured the affectionate thief that he did so, and Mr. Sam Filcher was satisfied.

"What part of the country are we now travelling through?" interrogated Beaufort.

"I doesn't not know, an' I doesn't not care," replied Filcher, "so long as ve can only keep out ov the clutches ov the traps. But I say, I should like to meet vith some cumfortable lush crib afore long, where ve could get summat to eat, an' drink, an' a lodgin', for I don't much like the idea ov a havin' to pad the hoof all night, I begins to feel preshus tired already."

"Do you think we might venture to put up anywhere, soon after our escape from custody?" asked Beaufort, timidly.

"In course ve might," returned Sam, whose to know us, or suspect us, if ve're only corshus?—Kim along, I shouldn't at all vonder but that ve shall tumble across a crib presently."

They now again quickened their speed, venturing on to the main road, with the hope of being more likely to meet with the place of accommodation they sought that way than any other.

They met with only two or three persons on the road, and after exchanging a friendly good night with them they passed on without exciting any suspicion.

They had to walk another hour, however, before they saw any signs of the house they required, and Beaufort as well as Sam Filcher began to feel rather anxious and weary after the speed with which they had travelled, and to require both refreshment and rest.

At length they came upon a small public road-side house, with a few straggling cottages close by, and Sam Filcher having expressed his satisfaction at the circumstance walked uncereemoniously into the first room he met with in the house, followed by Beaufort, and throwing himself into a chair, rang the bell for the attendance of the landlord, who was not long in making his appearance.

Sam in his usual polite and insinuating style, inquired whether they could have refreshment and accommodation for the night, to which the landlord replied in the affirmative, adding—"It's lucky you arrived

when you did, for in another half hour at the furthest my house would have been closed, and I should have retired to rest."

"Better late than never," said Sam;—"howsomdever here ve air, an' please the pigs, here ve shall remain, for the night. Now, old feller, yer jist tend to my horders, vill yer?"

The landlord bowed, and Sam then proceeded to give his orders on his usual scale of liberality, which the worthy host hastened willingly and promptly to fulfil.

While Sam and his companion were still busily occupied in disposing of the excellent fare that the landlord had placed before them, and congratulating themselves on their good fortune in meeting with such an establishment, they were interrupted in the midst of their conversation by hearing the rattling sound of wheels hastily approaching the inn, and the vehicle, whatever it was, directly afterwards stopped at the door.

Sam Filcher immediately rose from his seat, and walked to the window, from which he saw a gig standing at the door, and from which an elderly gentleman, attended by a livery servant, was just alighting, the landlord being in waiting to receive his commands.

After exchanging a few words with the host, the gentleman walked into the house, followed by his servant, after the latter had given the horse and chaise in charge of the ostler.

"Another customer to the crib," remarked Sam Filcher, as he resumed his seat, "and von who the landlord will be very happy to see, I should think, for he looks von ov the right sort. He's a goin' for to stop all night too, it seems; I vonder he should choose sich a kimmin inn as this here. Howsomdever, it may be lucky that he's done so."

"Why so?" hastily demanded Beaufort, fixing upon Sam a searching and uneasy look.

The latter returned some evasive answer, and then commenced whistling, which he continued to do for a few moments, when he suddenly ceased and dropped into a meditative mood, Beaufort watching him narrowly and with some degree of suspicion.

At length they were both aroused by hearing footsteps in the passage, which they imagined proceeded from the gentleman, who was about being shown to the chamber in which he was to sleep; and in that idea they were confirmed, by hearing the landlord giving instructions to his servant to "conduct the gentleman to chamber three on the first floor," and which Sam Filcher appeared to hear with a look of

satisfaction, which was not lost upon Beaufort, who felt his uneasiness and misgivings increase.

The landlord soon afterwards entered the room, and after expressing his sense of the high honour done him in having such a guest, he requested that Sam and Beaufort would retire to rest, as it was now late, and he wished to close the house.

With these wishes, Filcher and his companion complied, the former venturing to congratulate the worthy host on the respectability of his establishment, when such customers as the gentleman whom he had seen arrive, thought proper to resort to it.

"Yes," remarked the landlord, "I fancy I ought to feel myself highly flattered by having such a gentleman (for he is a real gentleman, I'm sure, and a rich one, too), for my guest. I have placed the very best chamber in my house at his disposal, and I don't think he'll have any reason to complain of the accommodation."

"Vell," returned Sam, with a smitten look, which the watchful and suspicious eye of Beaufort noticed, but the landlord did not—"I'm sure I vish the gemman a sound night's rest, an' that he may not be disturbed by them 'ere ugly dreams. Now, gunner, jist be so kind as to show me and my friend to our sleeping room, vill yer?"

There was something so coarse and vulgar in the language and manners, and the personal appearance of Mr. Sam Filcher which the landlord did not altogether admire, but as he was far from being an uncharitable man, he did not like to jump to any hasty conclusions, which might prove to be perfectly unfounded and unjust.

The worthy host having conducted the two villains up the first staircase, Sam Filcher cast an anxious look towards the chamber in which he had understood the gentleman to repose, and beheld a light glimmering through the crevices of the door from which he imagined that he had not yet retired to rest, and on passing by the door, he could hear him pacing the room to and fro, apparently with disordered footsteps, and muttering to himself.

The landlord led the way up a second flight of stairs, and ushering Filcher and Beaufort into a humble but comfortable chamber, bade them good night and left them to themselves.

Sam Filcher once more lighted his pipe, which he had only half smoked out, and seating himself on the side of the bed again appeared to be lost in the most profound meditation; Beaufort continuing to watch him narrowly, and with some curiosity, not unmingled with fear and suspicion.

"You seem thoughtfully, Sam," he at

length ventured to remark, "may I ask what is the subject of your meditations?"

"Oh, b'sness, b'sness, in course," replied Sam. "Must never lose sight ov that here, yer know."

"Certainly not," coincided Beaufort, in a half timid voice, and fixing a keen and penetrating look upon his guilty associate;—"but what is the nature of the business which thus so fully occupies your serious attention?"

"Bah!" replied Filcher, impatiently, "yer want to know too much. Howsomdever, it don't much matter, an' I don't know as how I ought to mind lettin' yer. Vell, then, I vos thinkin' vot a very nice respectibil lookin' gemman him as sleeps in number 3 on the first floor is,—an' vot a very rum start it is as he should come to this here crib the very same night as us. 'Twould be a pity not to ivail ourselves ov his kindness."

"Sam," said Beaufort, with a look of terror, "I now read distinctly the guilty thoughts that you have suffered to take possession of you. Beware, beware."

"Vill yer just hold that infernal tongue ov yourn?" said Sam, angrily, "or you an' I might chance to fall out. Keep yer foolish advice to yerself, I knows vot I'm about."

"Sam," again urged Beaufort, whose worst suspicions were now confirmed, "again I implore you to think no more of the guilty business which I am now convinced occupies your mind; for no good can come of it."

"Dammed fool," angrily returned Filcher, "yer'e alwus tryin' to perwent b'sness, an' a finkin' about nuffin:—I wonders as how I 'onnors sich a fellor vith mv comp'ny. Shut up, vill yer, an' go to bed."

"Will you not retire to bed also?"

"No;—I doesn't feel tired, an' I hasn't done smokin' yet. There go to bed, I say, vill yer?—an' nivir mind me. I shall come there presently."

Beaufort looked at him half supplicatingly, half fearfully, but Sam, who was getting impatient, repeated his command with an oath, and afraid of exciting his further anger, the former very reluctantly obeyed, the most dismal thoughts and misgivings taking possession of his brain.

But although Beaufort closed his eyes and pretended to go to sleep, in order to satisfy his ruffianly companion, it was some time ere his torturing thoughts, in spite of his fatigue, would suffer him to do so, and when he did his rest was much disturbed by unpleasant dreams.

How long he had thus slept he knew not, but he suddenly awoke in a state of alarm,

although he was completely ignorant of the cause of it.

He looked anxiously and hastily round the room. All was silent as the grave, and Sam Filcher was not there.

The most terrible forebodings crossed his mind, and he jumped quickly out of bed, he having only taken off his coat and waistcoat previous to retiring to it.

He trembled with an uncontrollable sensation of dread, and for a moment or two, he was so confused, that he knew not how to act.

At length he ventured gently to open the room door, and stepping noiselessly on to the landing, he listened with breathless attention, and in a state of the most painful suspense.

At first all remained silent, but having ventured to descend a stair or two, suddenly a half confused noise, like as of two persons struggling, and seeming to proceed from the very chamber occupied by the gentleman, smote his ears, and increased his alarm and misgivings.

Hastily he returned to the chamber, trembling in every limb, and awaited the result of this adventure in the most breathless state of terror and suspense.

He had not to wait long; he heard continuous but hasty footsteps ascending the stairs, the next moment the door was thrown open, and Sam Filcher, his looks excited, his cheeks flushed, and his whole appearance much disordered, entered the room.

Beaufort stared at him aghast, and they were both too much agitated for a moment or two to speak.

The countenance of the villain Filcher bespoke guilt, and Beaufort saw in a moment that his most terrible apprehensions and surmises were realized.

Sam at last grasped his wrist, and in a low and agitated voice, said:—

“No nonsense;—put on your coat and vestcoat directly, an’ foller me. The sooner we step it the better.”

“Sam, Sam,” said Beaufort, with a look of agony and terror;—“rash, guilty man, oh, what have you now done?”

“No matter,” answered Sam, hurriedly and impatiently,—“this here’s not the time or place for hexplanashun. Ve must be off without delay. No funkin’, there’s not nuffin broke.”

Beaufort still continued to gaze at the ruffian with looks of terror, but fearful of disobeying him, and especially when he felt convinced of the necessity of their immediate departure, he hastily put on his coat and waistcoat, and followed Sam Filcher noiselessly from the room, and down the

stairs, shuddering as they passed the door of the chamber in which the gentleman had been accommodated, and Sam quietly withdrawing the bolts of a door at the back of the house, they found themselves in the open air.

CHAPTER XC.

FRESH GUILT.—CONSCIENCE.

SAM FILCHER led the way from the main-road, and entering the fields, he and his wretched companion pursued their flight with the greatest precipitation, scarcely venturing even to look behind them.

The thoughts of Beaufort were of the most torturing description, for he could scarcely entertain a doubt as to the fresh crime which the hardened and blood-thirsty Sam Filcher had perpetrated, and he suffered all the horrors of terrors and remorse.

It was now just the break of day, and a hazy, cheerless morning, and a storm seemed to be fast gathering in the Heavens. But neither Sam or his guilty associate took any heed of the weather, so busily were their minds occupied other ways, and so impatient were they to get from the neighbourhood of the inn.

The hour was too early for them to meet with any one on their way, and that was satisfactory to them for their looks, and the extreme agitation of their manner would have been more than sufficient to excite suspicion, and might have been attended with the worst consequences.

Proceeding with the same precipitation, they had soon left the inn far behind them, and Sam Filcher being at last fairly winded, although the alarm and excitement he had at first exhibited, were greatly abated,—stopped to take breath, and to collect his thoughts, so as to try to decide more clearly the best manner to proceed.

“Vell,” he observed, wiping the perspiration from his forehead; “this here is vot I calls a belleser, an’ not no mistake, an’ it’s almost lick’d me out ov time. No matter,—it’s all right now, an’ so I breathes ag’in. Vhy, Captain, blessed if yer don’t look as white as a boiled turnip, an’ I can hear them here preshus knees ov yourn a knockin’ together like vintain; vot’s the matter with yer?”

“Sam,” returned Beaufort, in a faltering and tremulous voice, and looking at the hardened scoundrel as if he would penetrate his innermost thoughts; “again I ask you what you have done?”

“B’sness, b’sness, that’s all,” he replied with his usual coolness. “See here, my



toolup," he added, exultingly, and exhibiting a well-filled purse, and a valuable watch and appendages; "I've increased our stock. More yeller boys, and this here gold tucker; they'r not none so dusty, I reckon, an' vill make up for vot ve lost on the other hand."

"Filcher," said Beaufort, again fixing upon him a look of the utmost horror, "you have again committed murder."

"There yer'e out, Captain," returned the villain; "though I had a hard job to keep from doin' so, an' vos forced, like our other victim, to send the old gemman to sleep for awhile, afore I could 'complish my purpis, an' to perwent his givin' the alarm. Now vot have yer got to grumble about? I did'nt troubel yer to have nuffin to do vith it, so you've got not nuffin to cry

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about. But there's not no vay ov satisfyin' ov yer—Bah!"

"Sam," remarked Beaufort, "these repeated daring crimes, and following each other in such rapid succession, must quickly bring upon us the vengeance of the law. It is impossible that such an unparalleled career of infamy can much longer continue."

"In course it von't last for ever," said Sam, carelessly; "ve can't speet it, but vot ov that here? Vot's the odds as long yer happy? an' ve may as well as enjoy ourselves as long as it lastes. Yer alwus a blowin' ov me up, acos I never throws a chance away. If it wa'nt for my hindustry an' passywerence, why yer must have starved long long ago. But enuff ov this here; ve'd better make the best ov our vay,

afore it gets later, and then ve can hide ourselves in some snug crib, an' while ve air a restin' ourselves, ve can talk this here matter over, an see vot's best to be done. Kim along."

Beaufort saw it was useless to say more, and he therefore, after looking fearfully around to see that no one was near to observe them, followed Filcher from the spot where this brief colloquy had taken place, and they once more pursued their flight with even more, if possible, than their previous speed.

As they did so, however, Beaufort formed various conjectures in his mind as to the real character of the crime which the miscreant Sam Filcher had perpetrated, and he could not but entertain the worst apprehensions as to its enormity, and which fears and suspicions were strengthened by the observations and manners of the villain himself.

Very few persons were about at that early hour of the morning, but those whom they accidentally met with on their way, Beaufort saw with the most cowardly feelings of alarm, for he could not but imagine that every one looked on them with suspicion, and might read the extent of their guilt in their countenances.

Sam Filcher, however, treated the matter with the most perfect indifference; as he always did, and not only did not his conscience appear to trouble him the least in the world, but it was quite evident, judging from his manner and the expression of his features, that he was on remarkably happy terms with himself on that occasion; humming to himself, as he journeyed on his way, the burthen of a flash song, alternating with a whistle.

And thus the two villains proceeded for more than another hour, and by that time they had got many miles from the inn, and as they believed, (or rather as Sam Filcher believed, for Beaufort could not conquer his gloomy fears and forebodings), out of the way of danger for the present, although it was quite certain that the villanous affair would cause the greatest excitement in the neighbourhood, where it had taken place, and that every means would be taken that might lead to their detection and apprehension.

On entering the chamber of the gentleman (which Sam Filcher was enabled easily to do, the former having thoughtlessly neglected to close the door), he had only a few minutes before retired to bed, and had not yet quite fallen off to sleep; which the ruffian perceiving, and fearful that he might raise an alarm, thus frustrating him in his designs, immediately rushed upon him, and

dealt the gentleman a violent blow, which however did not have exactly the effect which he (Sam) desired, though it sufficiently stunned and stupified him to render him incapable of uttering the least cry for help.

But notwithstanding this, he almost immediately sufficiently recovered himself to spring from the bed (much to the surprise of the ruffian, who did not imagine for a moment that he could have found the strength or the courage to do so), and desperately grappled with him, although he being an old man and rather enfeebled, it was not at all likely that he could offer any formidable resistance to such a sturdy fellow as Sam Filcher.

A struggle of only a few moments ensued, when Sam, with a fearful oath, felled his unfortunate victim senseless, and the ruffian then proceeded to the work of plunder, not suffering any pocket belonging to his clothes to escape his strict examination; and having satisfied himself that he had possessed himself of everything valuable that the gentleman had brought with him, or, at any rate, of all that was portable, and in the room, the robber hastily retired and rejoined his infamous but cowardly associate in crime, as has been described.

It was not till more than an hour had elapsed after the robbery and outrage, and Sam Filcher and Beaufort, as has been shown, had got far on their flight from the Inn, that the gentleman was restored to consciousness, and he then immediately raised an alarm and aroused the landlord and his servants, whose suspicions, on hearing of the robbery, and the description which his unfortunate guest gave of the person of the robber, instantly fell on either Sam Filcher or Beaufort, and which were at once confirmed on going to their room and finding that they had abruptly departed.

No time was lost in making the robbery known to the nearest magistrate, and a pursuit was set on foot without delay, but with very little chance of success, especially as the villains had already had sufficient time to secure their escape, and were by that time no doubt, far away from the neighbourhood.

But to return to those two worthy gentlemen, Sam Filcher and Beaufort.

They continued on their way, but with less speed than at first, for it now seemed that they had got far beyond the reach of danger.

"Vell," observed Sam, "ve've made the best use ov our time, an' not no mistake, an' so far ve've had preshus good luck on our side. Vot say yer, my noble?"

"That I do not half like this bus'ness," answered Beaufort, "and depend upon it, Sam, even as you may pretend to be in your expectations, no good will come of it."

"An' vot harm can come on it, fool?" demanded Sam, impatiently, and fixing an angry look upon his companion.

"This robbery," returned Beaufort, "if indeed it is nothing worse, and of that I entertain my doubts, occurring so soon after the other, will no doubt cause the greatest sensation, and with a minute description of our persons being made public, it is more than probable that we cannot long escape detection."

"Detection be damned," replied Sam Filcher, contemptuously, "who's to dis-kiver us or suspect us?—Vy any von would suppose to hear yer truth, that ve look'd like a couple ov villains, 'stead ov gemman, as ve air, and that thief vos written in our faces. But yer'e alwus fane'in' ov summat, an' the gallows seems to be alwus in yer sight. I'm keвите tired ov yer, an' if it vasn't that ve are bound together, and must never be parted till our time comes, I should be very glad to get rid ov yer. But come, I say, old feller, if yer don't vish to offend yer partikler old pal, the Sprig ov Myrtle, which I don't think as how 'tould be very sensibel on yer part to do, yer'll just cut this nonsense in futir, an' be a brick, an' damn the konsikenses. Yer knows summat 'bout forin langidges,—French, an' all that sort ov patter, doesn't yer?"

"Yes," answered Beaufort, "but what of that?—Why do you put such a question to me?"

"Ah!" observed the worthy Sam, with a sigh of regret, "yer've got the wantage ov me in edicashun. Yer has, yer vos dragged up in a collitch, I s'pose,—I only vent to von ov them here *rashnal* schools, don't they call 'em, where they gives the boys more larrapin' than larnin'."

"And what is that to do with the subject we were talking upon," inquired Beaufort.

"Vhy," replied Filcher, "we've pretty vell breech'd now,—got enuff ov the rowdy to sport about vith for a time. So I've bin a thinkin' that if our names should chance to become too pop'lar, and this here blessed country vos to get too hot to hold us, it'd be very advisabel for us to hook it for awhile on th' continent, as all other gemman does; vot d'yer say to that here, my flower?"

The suggestion was not at all displeasing to Beaufort, and he therefore expressed himself to Sam Filcher accordingly.

"Vell then," observed the latter, that, here p'int's settled; an' when ve gets to a

proper place, ve'll jist overhaul our accounts, and see how the hixchicker stands. But its almost time ve got to some public-house, for I begins to feel tired, an' vants summat to revive the invard man."

Beaufort also felt tired, and would have been glad could he have found some place where he could hide himself from the scrutiny of any mortal being, for he felt as if his every look must condemn him, and found it quite impossible to quiet his apprehensions, realising the words of our immortal bard, namely,—

"The thief doth fear each bush an officer."

But no public-house, or the least signs of a human habitation met their anxious sight, and Sam Filcher, in particular began to feel very cross and impatient, and gave vent to his feelings in various oaths, of such a description, that we do not think it would be either amusing or instructive to the reader if we were to quote them in these pages.

And as if to make matters still more unpleasant, and to exasperate the feelings of the amiable Mr. Sam Filcher the more, the storm which, as before-stated, had been long threatening came on with violence, and seemed likely so to continue for some time, the angry elements contending against each other with the utmost fury.

Sam Filcher swore the louder and more frequently as the storm every moment increased; and Beaufort, independent of the fears and misgivings that had long taken possession of his mind, felt the weather add much to the irracibility and unpleasantness of his disposition.

Their difficulties were increased by being complete strangers to the part of the country they were travelling through, and meeting with no one of whom they might inquire, and in order to avoid observation, they had wandered so far from the main road, that their chances of meeting with such a place as they required, were rendered still more remote.

"Vell," remarked Sam, in no very agreeable tone, "this here's apreshus sitivation for two 'spectable gemmen to be placed in, an' no gammon votsomdever; blessed if I arn't a parfiet valkin' shower bath, an' not no mistake; as for yer, Captain, yer looks as dull an' as miserabel as a cove vot's jist a vaitin' to receive his reg'lurs at the vhippin' post, or to take a parting drop from the hands ov Mister Jack Ketch. Blessed if ve arn't a couple ov vet'rans. Ha! ha! ha!"

And the facetious Sam Filcher, in spite of his own uncomfortable plight, and of that more strongly exhibited by the wretched Beaufort (who was fully prepared to curse everything and everybody), laughed boist-

erously at what he considered to be his own exuberant and irresistible wit.

"This is no time or situation for joking, Sam," said Beaufort, with a look of disgust, "neither am I in any humour to listen to it."

"Sorry for that, my flower," returned the incorrigible Sam, "but can't help it, an' vot's the use ov cryin' or hollerin' about it, I should like to know; I should only jist like to be as vet inside as I am outside—that's all I've got to say. Wouldn't a drop ov white satin, an' a kevert or two ov gatter go down pleasant jist now, eh?"

"Pshaw," replied Beaufort, testily, "I've scarcely patience to listen to you. But have you no idea of the way we are proceeding?"

"Devil ov a smell of a hidear," answered Sam.

"Then, of course you know not whether we are likely to meet with a place of shelter?"

"Not I; how should I?"

Beaufort muttered a curse between his teeth, of which Sam took no notice; but in order to keep his own spirits from drooping under such remarkably trying circumstances he commenced whistling merrily if not melodiously.

Faster poured the rain,—still louder pealed the thunder, seeming at times to shake the very earth to its centre, and flashes of the most vivid lightning shot across the sky in the most rapid succession.

And now as if to add to their despair of meeting with any place of shelter, and of which they stood so much in need, they entered upon a gloomy and intricate forest, in which they might probably continue to wander for hours, and find it difficult to extricate themselves.

"Vell," remarked Sam, "we may as vell make up our minds to keep on valkin' for for never an' a day, an' that's all about it. So make yer miserabel life 'appy, Captain; it don't much matter, yer see, about the rain, now we're both as vet as a couple of puppies, I'm a gettin' vot I calls comfortably used to it."

It was no use his being otherwise, for both himself and his companion had long been completely drenched to the skin, and it was a matter of extreme doubt how long they would have to remain in their present disagreeable situation.

"I'm heartily tired of this kind of life," said Beaufort; "we are always exposing ourselves to some confounded difficulty or another."

"It's all owin' to the fortin' ov var," said Sam Filcher, "an' I rayther likes it than otherwise. Wariety is charmin', yer know, an' ve must have veather ov some sort or 'tother, so vots the use of grumblin' about

it. Ve must take it as it comes. But ye're sich a dissatisfied feller; there's not no pleasin' ov yer any how votsomdever.

Beaufort muttered something surlily, which could not be distinctly heard, and Sam taking not the slightest heed of him, or the inclemency of the weather either, whistled away as merrily in the midst of the raging storm (which had now attained its highest pitch of fury), as if he were enjoying himself to his very heart's content.

The forest seemed to have no end, and the further they proceeded the more they seemed to become involved in its deep and intricate mazes, until even the good temper and patience of the amicable Mr. Sam Filcher were nearly exhausted; and he suddenly ceased whistling, to give utterance to a volley of oaths of the coarsest possible description.

"I von't not stand this much longer," he said, "blessed if I does, an' that's th' pre-shus fact. It's verry improper treatment for a gemman as is a gemman to receive; an' I feels myself offended. If I doesn't have a glass or two ov summat to drink, hot an' stiff, afore long, I shall sartinly hex-pire."

"And our prospect of meeting with any place of shelter is as distant as ever," observed Beaufort. "It's unfortunate that we didn't keep to the main road, we might have been housed long before this storm came on."

"To be sure we might," returned Sam, "an' we should have stood a verry good chance of it two, if it vos only in a pris'n; an' I don't s'pose as how yer'd hav' bin pertik'ly grateful for that here sort ov 'commodation,—eh, Captain."

Beaufort did not much approve of these observations, seeing that they bore reference to that which was not at all unlikely to take place before long, but he said nothing, and as Sam Filcher did not seem inclined to enter into further conversation for the present, they proceeded on their miserable way, amidst the pitiless pelting of the storm, in silence.

"Hallo! vot vos that here?" at length said Sam, directing his gaze a little to the right of him.

"What's the matter, now?" timidly demanded Beaufort, apprehensive of some approaching danger. "What do you mean?"

"Didn't yer see nuffin in that here flash ov lighternin', just now?" interrogated Filcher.

"No," answered Beaufort, "only the thickly clustering trees; and it's almost as dark as midnight again now. What did you think you saw?"

"Vhy," replied his companion, "if my preshus eyes did not deceive me, I could almost hav' swore as I seed summat like a house, atween the trees yonder."

"No such luck," remarked Beaufort, looking in the direction to which Sam Filcher pointed. "You must have been mistaken. We are not likely to meet with a human habitation in the middle of this confounded forest, I should think."

"Vell, there's no harm in seein'," said Sam, "so come along, Captain. Ah! there it vos ag'in—yer must have seen that here, 'mong the op'nin' in them here trees."

It was, indeed, as Beaufort had observed, almost as dark as night; but the lightning's glare had, for the moment, enabled him to catch a glimpse of what seemed to be the outlines of a building between the trees, and his hopes of meeting with a place of shelter revived.

Sam and he hurried towards it, and breaking in between the trees, they soon discovered that they were right in their conjectures.

CHAPTER XCI.

UNPLEASANT REFLECTIONS—A DREAM.

THEY were the ruins of a large brick building, of the Elizabethan style of architecture, partly overgrown with moss and ivy, and which had evidently not been habitable for many years. There were no casements in the broken window frames, and the doors had long since decayed, and fallen from their hinges, leaving the ingress perfectly free to those who might desire it. Altogether, the aspect of these ancient ruins was anything but cheerful and inviting, especially situated as they were in so gloomy and wild a place.

Sam and his companion, however, seeing that they would afford them sufficient shelter till the storm should have in some measure abated (for it was still raging with great violence), beheld them with much satisfaction.

"Not kevine so good an' spicy like, as a boozin' ken," observed Filcher, eyeing the ruins of the old building before which himself and Beaufort stood; "but still, anythin' is better than nuffin', in a storm, an' thieves—beggars, I means—mustn't be choosers, as ve ses in the clarsicks; so in ve tumbles, eh, Captain."

The "Captain" raised no objection, although looking at the solemn and dreary aspect of the ruins, he could not resist a feeling of superstitious dread, which came over him at the moment, so in he and Sam

Filcher "tumbled," as the latter gentleman, by a happy figure of speech, had expressed himself, and found themselves in what had once probably been an open court, but which was now greatly obstructed by fallen heaps of rubbish, and intersected by lank weeds.

"A wery nice place this here has bin, I daresay, in my fust wife's time," observed Sam, surveying all around him with an architectural and philosophical eye; "but yer wouldn't take it for a palice, disackly, in its present condishun. Howsomedever, ve can manage to put up vith the 'commodashun for a time till this here preshus storm is over, I shouldn't vunder. A bit ov fire jist to dry our toggery, vouldn't be to be sneezed at, and plenty ov grog to renywate the inside lining would be ivir so much better. Kim along, guvener, we shall find a place to 'scape a further duckin', I'll be 'pon my davey."

Beaufort thought it best to coincide with all that Filcher said, and they proceeded in their examination of the ruins until they found themselves in a room which had not suffered so much from the ruthless and devastating hand of time, and where they could remain free from the immediate exposure to the weather, until it had become more favourable to the resumption of their journey.

It had doubtless been, in the pristine days of the building, one of its principal apartments, and notwithstanding so many years had elapsed, and most of its former compeers had almost crumbled into dust, it still retained the phantom remains of many of the elegancies that had at a remote period characterised it.

The oaken wainscoting and flooring were all but perfect, the ceiling was nearly sound, and there was sufficient shreds or remnants of tapestry left to assure the observer of the taste as well as wealth of the individual who had once occupied it.

"Here ve air," said Sam, very contentedly seating himself upon the floor, and appearing to feel as much at home in that old apartment, (with its curious carved work assuming, as he gazed upon it, in his imagination, every grotesque shape), as if he had inhabited it from the earliest days of his childhood; "here ve air, snug an' comfortibel arter all our troubles an' hardships. An' now, if ve had only got summat to drink, an' pipes an' baccy, vhy, ve should be as happy as sand-boys—eh, Captain."

Beaufort could not by any means agree to this, seeing that being drenched to the skin and cold and shivering, he could not by any stretch of the imagination conceive how it was possible that the said summat to

drink, an' a pipe an' baccy," to which the worthy Sam had alluded, could place him in the enviable state of happiness which he had described.

However, he did not reply either one way or the other, and Sam Filcher went on to say :—

"Rare old place this; gloomy enuff to be sure. Now, I vonders whether this here crib is von ov them here places, vot is 'aunted by the ghosts of some murdered lady ov title, or some rich old uncle sent out of the world afore his time, by some nevy as vanted is tin."

"Hold, Filcher," hastily but tremulously returned Beaufort, a feeling of superstitious fear stealing over him, as he glanced timidly around the ancient and dreary room, as though he expected to see some ghastly object, "there's no necessity for such remarks, especially in such a place as this, and coming from you, whose hands are yet probably——"

"There, shut up, vill yer?" interrupted Sam, with an angry and dissatisfied look; "I knows vot yer vos 'bout to say 'bout my han's, but yer'd better cut that here nonsense, vich yer'e alwus' arpin' upon like some old 'oman, or ve might chance to kevarrel. As for the ghostes, I believe as how that here's all guff, though I must say I should like to see a spirit jist now, if it vos only in the shape ov a bottle of rum or vHITE satin. But I say, Captain, bless'd if yer ar'n't a feard; vhy yer teeth's chaterin'. an' yer looks as vHITE as a vindin sheet."

Beaufort was indeed afraid, even in daylight, (if such the dull obscurity which pervaded that apartment, and which was only 'broken at intervals by the flash of lightning, could be called), and the last comparison which his companion had drawn did not serve to enliven him.

The thought of the unfortunate old butler at lord Selbourne's, whom Sam had so deliberately and cruelly murdered, and he worked himself up to such a pitch of excitement that he could almost imagine he again saw his ghastly features as they had looked in his dying moments.

The loud voice of the tempest, too, which shook and rattled through the ruins, only served to add to the gloom and terror of his feelings, which he found it both impossible for him to conquer or conceal.

"Vot a preshus one yer air, to be sure," remarked Sam, after a brief pause, during which he had been eyeing Beaufort with a look of the most supreme contempt; "yer gets vorse and vorserer ev'ry day, an' I shall never be able to make a man on yer, I'm afear'd. Damme, if I ar'n't 'shamed on yer. I've often told yer that I doesn't like

such nonsense, cos it might lead to dangerous konsekenes in comp'ny, so I'd advise yer, if yer vishes to continny the 'onner ov my friendship, to cut it in futir. Yer understand-me?"

Beaufort *did* understand him, and doing so, his uneasiness was by no means diminished, although he endeavoured to conceal it from the keen observation of Sam Filcher as much as possible.

"Now then," said Sam, after a minute or two's reflection, "s'pose as how ve takes stock, now there's not no von here to hobserve us, an' then ve shall see how ve're agoin on, and vot ve can do to better our condition."

He emptied his pockets of the tobacco box, which he had before mentioned as one of his secret hoards,—also the purse and the gold watch, the proceeds of his last robbery, and having first satisfied himself by examining the former, and finding the money all right, he proceeded to count the contents of the purse, having first teamed the gold into his lap.

This operation seemed to afford him the most infinite satisfaction, and when he had concluded it, and secured the ill-gotten booty as before, he said—

"All right, Captain, ve're better horff than I thought ve vos, an' not no mistake; blessed if there ar'n't more nor a hunder'd p'un' in the hixchicker."

"And which will do us no good," said Beaufort, with a gloomy, dissatisfied look.

"Oh, von't it nayther?" returned Sam "vell ve shall see. Howsomdever, if yer thinks as how it's not good for yer complaint, I'd advise yer not to take it, by not no manner ov means. I dare say I can manage to do yer share an' my own too, without a puttin' ov myself to any pertikler hinconvenience."

"Tell me, Sam," said Beaufort, fixing upon him a searching and suspicious look; "I again ask you, and beg that you will not deceive me; has there been no bloodshed in this guilty business?"

"There now," replied Filcher, impatiently, "I told yer before, there hadn't, hav'n't I? and if there had been, vot ov it? It wouldn't have been my fault, I dare say. But don't ax me ag'in, for it makes me feel kevit'e 'dignant to hav' my vord an' 'onner doubted. All as ve've now got to do is to take care as ve ar'n't cotched. An' that here's von thing vy I vishes this here storm vos over,—that ve might get on the road ag'in, though it's not very likely as they'd think ov lookin' for us here."

The storm, however, gave no signs of abating, but, on the contrary, rather seemed

to increase, and so it threatened to continue throughout the day.

Two hours passed away in the same dull, tedious way, Sam endeavouring to while away the time by singing and whistling alternately, and Beaufort pacing the room to and fro with disordered steps, and deeply wrapped in gloomy thought.

"Vell," remarked Sam, at last, his patience being sorely tried at the delay; "this is a start. The storm gets vorser an' vorserer, I do think, an' so I s'pose ve must make up our minds to take up our lodgin' here for the day, without a preshus morsel to eat, or a drop to drink. That's damned hard cheese. No matter; its not no use to grumble at it, so, pastured as a lamb, I resigns myself to my fate. There's vorser misfortins than this here at sea, an' its only for life, that's all, if it vos von day longer, bless'd if I'd stand it."

Sam Filcher was perfectly right in his conjectures,—the storm did continue to rage with unmitigated violence throughout the day, and he and his companion had no alternative but to remain where they were, hungry and miserable; for to expose themselves again to the tempest, without any chance of meeting with a shelter, they could not think of doing.

"It's a blessed thing as ve're so 'appy an comfortable," observed amiable and facetious Sam, "an' can alwus 'commodate ourselves to nuffin, or as it's a rattling down now, an' the thunder a roarin', an' the lighternin' a flashin', an' all that here sort ov thing, ve might hav' begun to think as how ve'd nuffin votsomdever to do but to be preshus miserable, an' that here wouldn't not fit the Sprig of Myrtle's fire place at all. Now, Captain, look alive, an' don't be a sittin' there thinkin', an' a frettin' yourself into a fever 'bout a mere trifle. There's many as is worserer horff than ve air, I dare say."

Beaufort seemed to entertain a very strong doubt as to the truth of that assertion, for he thought it was really impossible for any one to be more absolutely wretched than himself, at least in existence at that moment. But he knowing full well what a folly on his part, it would be to oppose in argument such a powerful and learned antagonist as Sam Filcher, desisted, and the subject was allowed to drop. Sam again consoling himself with a flash song or two, and picturing to himself in the most glowing colours, the sumptuous "go in" he would have the next time it should happen to be his good fortune to set down to a good meal, and all the indispensable appendages, namely, a liberal supply of what he

elegantly termed "pongelow," "dog's nose," and "white satin."

But Beaufort could not so easily reconcile his thoughts, and filled with cowardly fears, and strange, yet irresistible presentiments, he abandoned himself to the most gloomy meditations, inwardly cursing the moment that had first initiated him into the desperate and hopeless course of villany he then, and had for so many years pursued.

In order to leave Sam Filcher to the indulgence of his own, no doubt, pleasant reflections, and to escape his too close scrutiny, Beaufort again left his seat (which, like that of his companion, had been on the floor), and, after pacing the room in the same disordered manner that he had previously done, for a few minutes, he walked to the broken casement, and with a sullen aspect, looked out upon the cheerless prospect before him, and the tempest which was still exercising all its might in the most determined manner.

The war of elements had now become truly frightful,—the rain descended in a perfect sheet;—the lightning literally blazed in the Heavens, and every terrific peal of thunder, in its reverberations,—seemed to have the effect of an earthquake, the ruins tottering, and large portions of them falling, and threatening inevitable destruction to all who might be passing beneath.

Forest trees, of gigantic proportions, and the growth of ages, were split and blasted by the lightning like so many insignificant twigs;—the earth steamed from the violence of the pelting rain, and the whole works of Nature, in fact, seemed awfully convulsed, and threatened death to all those unfortunate individuals who at such an hour might be exposed to the horrors of the weather.

Beaufort felt appalled, as he gazed, and his fears, and the upbraidings of a guilty conscience became more apparent in him every moment.

But still a nameless feeling, and one for which he was not very well able to account, rivetted him to the spot, and he continued to gaze vacantly, still most earnestly upon the wild scene which was taking place before him, while at the same time he trembled, and could almost fancy that he heard the curses of offended Heaven on his guilty head, in every peal of the thunder.

Sam Filcher, however, now seemed to have fully made up his mind to be as merry, as happy, as agreeable, and as contented under all the painful circumstances, as it was possible for any person well to be. The more deafening the thunder, the louder he sung; every flash of lightning he fel-

lowed by what, he no doubt, considered to be a brilliant little sally of wit,—and when he felt tired of that description of rational entertainment, he jumped up, and did the double shuffles, and “the Newgate twist,” with a rapidity of movement, if not the grace of execution (accompanying himself with a Her Von Joel sort of whistle), that might have fairly taken the conceit out of, and put to the blush any professor of dancing in the United Kingdom, or out of it either.

“My preshus eyes,” he remarked, after a brief pause he had taken to rest himself after these manly and healthy exercises, “this is a pleasant day, and not no mistake. Bless’d if it a rn’t keвите refreshin’ to hear vot a jolly row the angry heliments is a kickin’ up with von another. A man might enjoy it much better though, over a good stiff glass or two ov the right sort, an’ afore a blazin’ fire ; an’ my hungry belly ; an’ my parched throat begins to ride rusty. Captain, yer seems to be a takin’ ov a wery pretty sinnyhopsis at that here vinder, if yer’e able to write a wery fine novill arter this. Ve’d better see about makin’ ov our ‘rangements for the night, however, for that this here storm vill not never leave hoff, an’ that here ve shall have to stop till it does, is a fact, as I’m perfectly ready to stake my *half-a-dawey* ‘pon. It von’t take us much trouble to shake up the feathers, an’ to make the bed, howsomdever, cos yer see, ve shall have to take ground for the floor, or rayther the floor for a doss. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha !”

And Mr. Sam Filcher appeared to be so highly delighted at this happy state of affairs, and the comfortable prospect before them, that, much to the annoyance of his guilty companion Beaufort, he laughed so heartily, that he made the old ruins resound again, and could be plainly heard even above the loudest voice of the tempest.

It was quite evident, however, that Sam’s predictions would be fulfilled, namely, that the storm would continue for an indefinite period, and that they must make up their minds, notwithstanding the badness of the accommodation, to remain where they were for the night ; so that Beaufort was compelled to meet the difficulty with as much patience and the best grace he could.

The day thus wore slowly and tediously away, and night came at last, by its almost impenetrable gloom increasing the horrors of the storm, which had continued without intermission throughout the whole of that period, and gave no more signs of abating than it did at the commencement.

Sam Filcher was lounging on the floor,

with as much apparent ease and composure, as if he had stretched his limbs on a sofa or bed of down, and Beaufort had seated himself on a small block of stone in one corner of the room, and with his elbows on his knees, and with his head resting on his hands, was lost in gloomy meditation, so much so, in fact, that he now paid but little attention to the tempest that was raging without.

The thought of the happy days of his childhood, when so bright and cheerful was the prospect before him, and one idea of wrong had never entered his mind. Then he recalled to his memory his first fatal step in the pathway of guilt, and the rapid progress he had made in that wild career, until he had become so involved in the vortex of crime, that he found it impossible to extricate himself, and so went to ruin, to destruction, recklessly and headlong.

Conscience reminded him of his numerous atrocious deeds, especially of his base conduct towards the misguided Lord Selborne, who, but for him, would have remained in all probability, an ornament to society, and have done that good to his less fortunate fellow-creatures which his wealth and high position would have enabled him to do. He reflected upon his infamous transactions with the hardened scoundrel Filcher, from the first hour that they had become acquainted, and more than all, he remembered the awful scene of the murder at Lord Selborne’s, to which he had been a guilty accessory, and he shuddered, and anticipated with horror the terrible retribution, which, sooner or later must overtake him, and which he was so ill-prepared to meet.

The solemn darkness of night, broken only at intervals by the lurid glare of the lightning, did but serve to increase the terror and agony of these feelings,—and so powerful did they at last become, that it was not without the greatest difficulty he could control them within the bounds of reason.

Sam Filcher was too deeply engaged in the means he had selected to while away the tedious hours, and to send old care, as he eloquently expressed himself, “to blazes,” to take much notice of his guilty associate, and thus some time elapsed without their exchanging any observations with each other. At length, however, as a sudden thought seemed to strike Sam, he said :—

“Vell, I must say that I’ve spent many a much more happy day than this here has bin, an’ lived much better, an’ drank much better, an’ smoked more baccy. But no matter, I’m not agoin’ for to go to



grumble. I'm alwus contented vith not nuffin'. Hollo, Captain, my toolup, where air yer, an' how's yer mortal remains by by this here round?—It's so preshus dark, that I can't see yer. I hope as how yer'e a enjoyin' ov yerself on this here remarkable fine night."

Beaufort, who was in no humour, as has been shown, to enjoy himself, or the vulgar and would-be witty conversation of the incorrigible Mr. Sam Filcher, so he merely returned some laconic and evasive answer, and then relapsed into silence and dismal meditation.

"It's almost bedtime, I'm thinkin'," said Sam, at last, "an' as I feels rather dozey, I may as vel go to sleep at vonce. I don't happen to have my nightcap vith me, which is rayther awkward;—howsomdever, I don't

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s'pose I shall cotch cold for vonce in a vay, so here goes. Good night, Captain, my rum un, an' pleasant dreams to yer."

With these words Sam Filcher contentedly stretched himself at full length on his back on the floor, and in a very few minutes was enfolded in the arms of Morpheus, and snoring loudly.

Beaufort continued to sit, absorbed in thought, for some time longer, but at length weary and exhausted, and anxious to obtain if possible, a short respite from the misery of his feelings, he followed the example of Sam Filcher, and was quickly wrapped in sleep.

But more painful, if possible, were his slumbers than even his waking moments, for the thoughts that had so long tortured him, continued to prey upon his mind, and

heating his imagination, conjured up such frightful dreams as seldom haunt any other than the pillow of the most guilty.

Again in imagination was the fearful scene of the robbery and murder at Lord Selborne's renewed, and with even additional horrors. He beheld the guilty miscreant Filcher, strike the fatal blow;—he heard the agonized groan of the murdered man; he saw the blood trickling from the gaping wound;—he beheld the ghastly features, the last awful looks of the murdered man as he had fixed them on Filcher and himself; and trembling with convulsive horror, Beaufort awoke.

A strange sensation agitated him in a most extraordinary manner; he raised his head;—gracious Powers!—was he still dreaming, and did his eyes deceive him?—Was it some wild, some terrible delusion? As he opened his eyes and raised his head, he could almost have sworn that the same ghastly face which he had seen in his dream was before him, and that the filmy eyes as they appeared at the quick approach of death, were glaring full upon him.

Gradually it seemed to fade away, and Beaufort was so strongly impressed with the idea that he had indeed seen a vision, that he startled to his feet, and uttered a loud cry of horror which awoke Sam Filcher, and drew from him an oath at being disturbed from his slumbers.

"Vot's the matter vith yer now?" he sternly demanded; "vot air yer a makin' ov that here preshus row for?—Hav' yer got the nightmare? It's wery hard, wery, that arter the fatigues ov the day, a gemman can't be allowed to take his natral rest in kviet, but he must be disturbed by a hidgous noise like that here. Vot's the matter vith yer, I say? For I can hear yer teeth chatterin', and yer knees a knockin' together tho' I can't see yer. Yer hasn't seen von ov them here ghostes, ov hobgoblins as ve vos a talkin' about, has yer?"

"Hush, Sam," said Beaufort, in a faint and tremulous voice, and at the same time looking timidly through the darkness round the room; "talk not so lightly, treat not with levity so serious a subject. Would that we were out of this gloomy place."

"Bless'd if yer ain't as veak as a babby," remarked Sam, contemptuously; "vot air yer frightened at? Yer has n't seen nuffin, has yer?"

Beaufort made an effort to explain, but the words died away on his lips, and he felt no power to make any reply to Sam Filcher, who after some more taunts and grumbings, again stretched himself on the floor, and after yawning two or three times, once more

sunk off to sleep, and snored, if possible, still more loudly than before.

Beaufort could not conquer the terror of his feelings, and he almost feared to look around him, lest his eyes should encounter some ghastly object.

He walked to the window and looked out with the hope of diverting his thoughts from the gloomy subjects that engrossed them. But the dreary scene which he there beheld was little calculated to dissipate the misery of his feelings.

The storm at this time had much abated, but the rain still descended in torrents, and the lightning flashed, and the thunder murmured in the distance occasionally.

It was now some time past midnight, and Beaufort anxiously looked for daylight, by which time the storm would probably have entirely subsided, and he and Sam would then resume their journey.

Terrible were the thoughts that continued to rack his brain. He had seldom experienced greater misery than he did at that moment, and it was in vain that he tried to conquer or dismiss them.

To attempt to sleep again that night, he very well knew would be useless, and he therefore abandoned the idea, and remained standing at the window, and gazing vacantly at the dismal scene before him.

Sam Filcher, still slept soundly and snored loudly, and it did not seem likely that anything would have the power again to disturb him for some time.

The storm which had raged for so many hours, at length ceased; the black and ponderous clouds that had so long darkened the sky, dispersed, and the moon at length showed her silvery face, imparting some degree of cheerfulness to that which had previously borne an aspect of gloom, bordering even upon horror.

It was some relief to Beaufort, and the terrors that had before beset his mind were, to a certain extent, ameliorated; but still his anxiety for the appearance of daylight, and to leave the ruins was as great as ever.

He reflected upon Sam Filcher's suggestion that they should at the earliest opportunity, and while they had the means of doing so, leave England and retire for better concealment to the continent, until the excitement which their late desperate transactions was likely to create, should in some measure have passed away,—and he could not but approve of it, and feel eager for its being promptly acted on.

But oh, how deeply did he regret that circumstances would not allow him to rid himself of such a reckless and blood-thirsty scoundrel as Sam Filcher, who excelled in his own villany, and took a fiendish delight

in dragging him into the same path of crime, in spite of his remorse, and which could not but end in his destruction.

But Filcher held him completely in his power, and however atrocious the crimes that he might think proper to commit, he, (Beaufort) would be compelled to participate in them.

That thought, if possible, tortured and appalled him more than any, and made the certainty of the ignominious fate that convicted him the more fearfully apparent.

"Oh, are there no means of escaping so dreadful a doom," he soliloquised, as he still stood at the window, and gazed into the now bright moonlight sky, with an intensity of expression that showed the terrible feelings then agitating his guilty breast; "are there no means of avoiding a fate so awful, and of making atonement for the past by a sincere repentance?—Oh! no, no, no, my crimes have been too great, too hideous to deserve or to escape the just though terrible retribution of offended Heaven, and I feel that nothing else awaits the guilty, wretched Beaufort, but a death of shame and ignominy in this world and perdition in the next. Horrible thoughts! my soul shrinks appalled as it occurs to me.

In the agony of his feelings, he bent his breast, and groaned aloud, and the longer he reflected, the greater did that agony become.

At length the long wished-for daylight appeared, and Beaufort did then feel some little relief, especially as the morning was remarkably fine, and there was nothing to prevent himself and Sam Filcher from proceeding on their journey without any more delay.

But the latter gentleman still slept soundly, and Beaufort was afraid to incur his anger, by arousing him, although he was most impatient to begone.

With the hope of beguiling the time until his associate in crime should awake, and diverting his gloomy thoughts from their present channel, Beaufort left the room, and descending the stairs, walked from the ruins to some little distance beyond, and in this manner he occupied himself for about half an hour, and on his return to the room, he found that Sam Filcher was not only awake but grumbling to himself, and on his entrance Beaufort heard him mention his name in no very complimentary or flattering terms.

"Now then," he demanded surlily, "where the devil have yer bin to, eh? I vos a thinkin' as how von ov them here ghostes as no doubt 'aunts this here place, had valked hoff with yer, or that yer'd gone an'

left me. But yer dare not do that here, I says as how yer dare not, an' I means vot I ses, too, yer understand me, don't yer?"

The look he fixed on the unhappy Beaufort as he uttered these words, was frightfully significant, and he trembled, for he did understand him, and he was too well aware that he never held out a threat which he failed to carry into effect.

"You slept, Sam," said Beaufort in a faltering and conciliatory tone, "and as I did not wish to disturb you, and——"

"Ah!—I see," interrupted Filcher, with a sarcastic look, "yer has a pertikler regard for my health jist now, an' as the doctor ses as how I'm not to be disturbed, it's verry kind an' con—siderate ov yer to obey the doctor's horders; but I advise yer to look arter yerself as vell as me, for if yer dares to attempt to play me any dirty tricks, I'll—but there, yer knows me, I believe, an' so there's no 'casion to say nuffin more on that here. It may p'raps be as vell to remind yer that the bill which ve seed hoferin' a revard for our apprehenshun and conviction for the affair at Lord Selborne's, also promises a free pardin to any 'complice vot did not do the deed, and vot'll giv evidens, an' I shouldn't vonder now, if Sam Filcher should suspect as how yer vos about to turn snitch, he's sich a artful ould customer, but he might turn the tables 'pon yer, and shift all the blame on yer shoulders; so yer see as how yer'd not be verry likekerly to gain much by that hare move."

Beaufort looked at him aghast, and could no longer conceal his powerful emotions. That terrible idea had never occurred to him, but he knew that Filcher was just the villain who was capable of doing all that he had thus intimated,—and he felt himself more fearfully in his power than before, and could not but view him with the most cowardly feelings of terror.

"Filcher," he gasped forth, and fixing upon him a look of supplication,—“you surely could not, desperate villain even as you are, be guilty of an act so monstrous as that which you have just now threatened.”

"Yer think so, does yer?" returned the ruffian, "then although ve has been pals for so many years, I'm afearad as how yer don't disacely know the Sprig of Myrtle yet!—Howsomdever, I wouldn't not advise yer to try his temper on that here pertikler p'int, that's all."

Beaufort shuddered, and he could scarcely refrain from giving utterance to a groan of agony and despair.

"So now," remarked Sam, "arter that here little bit ov a perlite hintimashun an' hexplanashun, ve may as vell drop the sub-

jict for the presint. That here blessed storm's over at last I sees; I feel most pre-shus hungry—almost starvin' an' ready to eat my own boots; so the sooner ve gets on the road, an' tries to find some crib where ve can get vot ve wants, the better."

Beaufort, of course, raised no objection to this, anxious as he was to quit the ruins, and after exchanging a few more words, they took their departure.

CHAPTER XCIII.

A SCENE IN THE HAZEL DELL.

WE have so long digressed from the other events of our tale, in order necessarily to follow the guilty career of Filcher and Beaufort, that doubtless the reader will feel anxious that we should now return to Phoebe Mayfield and her friends.

We left out heroine and Henry Ashford, and his sister in a state of great alarm and excitement, after the appearance, and the warning, and predictions of that singular and mysterious old woman, the Gipsy Sybil, and it was some time ere they could recover themselves from the effects of it.

Henry and his amiable sister, exerted themselves to the utmost to tranquilize the feelings of Phoebe, but it was some days before they could at all succeed in doing so, and then it was impossible for them to remove the impression it had left upon her mind.

So strangely had the former prognostications of this eccentric being been realized, that it was not at all wonderful that Phoebe should pay such serious attention to her observations, and even look upon her with a feeling of superstitious awe; and even her lover, and Amy (though they tried to conceal their real thoughts from her notice, lest they should add to that uneasiness which they were so anxious to quiet and subdue), could not but attach far greater importance to the remarkable and painful event than it probably deserved.

Some days elapsed, and matters remained much about the same, but nothing more occurred to create their anxiety and alarm.

But that which was more torturing to Henry Ashford, consequent on the effect produced on the mind of Phoebe Mayfield by the predictions of the old Gipsy woman, was the determination which she expressed of withdrawing her consent to their union at the time fixed, and for an indefinite period; and every argument or persuasion that he could make use of, failed to induce

her to change that resolution, so that he was compelled to submit with all the patience he could summon, and to console himself with the sweet, though melancholy assurance, that even if it should be the will of Heaven that their fates should never be united, her love must ever remain the same, that nothing whatever could change that faithful heart which he was happily convinced now beat for him alone.

Time somewhat ameliorated the anguish of Phoebe at the mysterious and painful adventure, still it was impossible for her to dismiss it entirely from her thoughts, and thus all the arrangements for the nuptials of herself and Henry Ashford were postponed for an indefinite period, and all the bright hopes that he had so fondly cherished, were for the present destroyed.

Poor old Mark Mayfield, it was a great consolation to find, continued to progress favourably, and the opinions of the physicians who attended him were strengthened, namely, that he would ultimately, and at no distant period, recover from the terrible malady with which he had been so long afflicted.

Oh, what a source of unspeakable joy was that assurance to our heroine, and to all those who were in any way interested in the fate of the unfortunate old man, and their prayers were constantly offered up to Heaven that these hopes and expectations might not be disappointed, but that the light of reason being once more permitted to dawn upon his so long benighted senses, that reconciliation between himself and his daughter, so devoutly to be wished, might at last be accomplished.

But we must now proceed to relate a remarkable event which took place near the quiet little village of Dewsbury, and which caused an extraordinary and painful sensation at the time.

Four years had now elapsed since that fatal evening which marked the commencement of those misfortunes (in the elopement of our heroine, and the awful and sudden death of the poor old dame her mother) which it has been our painful task to record.

And now once more came round the happy season of harvest home, which it was resolved to celebrate with all its usual festivity, the principal entertainments it being again arranged to take place in the Hazel Dell.

Notwithstanding the melancholy and torturing recollections that such a scene, and in such a place, could not resist the powerful temptation she had to be present at the many sports in the old Hazel Dell, on that joyous occasion, and Henry and his sister, of course, were to accompany her.

Mr. Stubbles and his worthy partner, together with all the other notabilities and old particulars of the village, and the surrounding neighbourhood were also to be present, and, as everything was to be conducted on an unprecedented scale of liberality; it was fully expected that the amusements would go off with adequate *eclat*.

Nothing could be finer or more inviting than the weather;—the sun shone forth in meridian splendour, the verdant fields and meadows, (after some refreshing showers in the night) wore their richest aspect of emerald green; the wild flowers had never appeared more lovely in their simple beauty; gentle Zephyrs were wafted sweetly to the grateful senses, and indeed all things in nature seemed more than usually smiling and happy on that auspicious occasion.

The sports commenced at an early hour of the morning and were continued throughout the day with unabated spirit,—Mr. Stubbles with that hospitality which was one of his greatest characteristics, giving a plentiful feast at his mansion to all who chose to come, and afterwards providing his numerous guests with a variety of rustic sports upon the green lawn in front of his residence, and into which none entered more merrily than himself and his wife.

But the Hazel Dell, the pretty and romantic Hazel Dell was the great place of attraction,—and thither all hastened, as the evening approached, anxious to join in the merry dance, and among the rest, it need scarcely be added, were our heroine, her lover, and the gentle Amy.

But what were the mingled emotions that agitated the bosom of poor Phoebe on entering the Dell?

Need we attempt to describe them? The terrible, the torturing past recurred to her memory, and all life, happiness, and innocent employment as was exhibited in the old Hazel Dell on that occasion, and anxious as were her wishes to join the humble revellers in their rustic festivities with that spirit and vivacity which so joyous a celebration demanded, she was compelled for some little time to yield to the sad influence of retrospection and its consequent attendant, remorse.

The heart-rending parting scene with her aged parents, when dressed in all their finery attended a similar meeting as the present, on the fatal evening of her elopement with Lord Selborne, the dreadful struggle with her feelings, the torturing battle between love and filial duty, and all that subsequently followed, rose so forcibly to her recollection, that she felt almost overpowered, and regretted that she should have been induced to be present at a scene

which must remind her of that which she would fain have wished could have been buried in oblivion altogether, or had never occurred.

Every word that her parents had uttered on the melancholy and fatal occasion alluded to, was reiterated in her mind, and went like a dagger to her heart. Again, in imagination she heard their merry laugh, as it pealed forth, whilst with trembling hesitation she listened at the door of their then happy home, but which she was so shortly to render miserable and desolate by her misconduct.

She saw them as they then appeared in all their rustic simplicity, proud of their only child who they thought, in their fond confidence, could sooner have died than deceived them, or be guilty of that which could call the blush of shame in their venerable cheeks. She beheld the poor old dame strutting before her in all her simple and laudable vanity, nay, she could almost fancy that she heard her repeat the very words that she then uttered, namely:—

“Weel, I don’t think that I do look so much amiss for an o’d ’oman!”

And the reminiscence was so vivid, and so truly agonizing, that she could scarcely repress a cry of emotion; and that feeling was increased when gazing vacantly around her, and upon the happy faces of the persons then assembled, she recalled to her memory, (as it had been described to her), the awfully sudden death of her mother on receiving the fatal intelligence of her cruel desertion; and she could almost imagine that she beheld the ghastly features of the poor old woman fixed reproachfully upon her, and as they then appeared.

The merry strains of music fell discordantly on her ears; the merry laughter of the revellers, as they tripped it in the giddy mazes of the fantastic dance, was bitter mockery to her, nay, even the bright smiling face of the moon, which then looked down so cheerfully upon the festive scene, seemed to her disordered imagination, to convey the same meaning, and, shrinking with a sensation bordering upon horror, at herself, she clung tremblingly to the arm of Henry, and in a voice scarcely articulate, said:—

“Let us return, for pity’s sake, let us return home. If it was rash, it was wrong, it was very wrong and cruel of me to venture here to night. Oh, pray let me, at any rate, return home, I cannot, I dare not witness this joyous scene with all the terrible thoughts that now beset and distract my brain.”

“For Heaven’s sake, my dearest Phoebe,”

replied her lover, who, of course fully appreciated her feelings, "endeavour to banish those dismal thoughts from your mind! and, if only for a time, to participate in the innocent pleasures of this happy party."

"Oh, it is impossible, it is utterly impossible that I should do so," sighed our heroine, "I feel that I have no business here, that I must come only as a blight upon that happiness you have described. My proper place is in the old churchyard, weeping tears of blood, and praying for mercy and forgiveness on my mother's humble grave."

And unable any longer to restrain her emotions, she burst into a convulsive flood of tears, and hid her face in the bosom of Amy, who was almost as deeply affected as herself.

Henry and his sister, however, for a few minutes, did not attempt to reply to her melancholy observations, or to interrupt her in her grief, for they hoped by giving vent to it, her anguish would be alleviated, and that she could more patiently and calmly then enter with something like enjoyment into the festivities of the evening.

And their wishes were happily realised, for after the first ebullition of her grief and remorse, and her reasoning faculties were enabled to resume their wonted ascendancy, a voice, seemed to whisper such heavenly consolation in her ear, that she could not resist its influence; a faint smile irradiated her pale, but beauteous features, bespeaking renewed hope, and silently and gently taking the arms of Henry and his sister, she suffered them, after they had received the friendly welcomes and congratulations of the persons present, to conduct her to a seat, the very seat which was occupied by her parents on the eventful evening that she quitted her peaceful home,—but she knew it not, and happy indeed it was for her that she did not!

More brightly shone the harvest moon, tinging all around with its silvery hues, and seeming to impart additional animation and joy to the faces of the merry throng. The fiddler waxed, or rather rozzined desperately, the fifer *pip*ed his very hardest, sprightly feet, and fascinatingly turned ancles sported in their highest and liveliest mood, and sylph-like forms were whirled joyously round, and led through all the mazes of the dance by rustic partners, who responded heartily to their mirthful laughter, till they made "the very welkin ring again."

And now the hilarious scene was at its full height of vivacity and irresistible revelry, and it was impossible for even Phoebe

to gaze upon it without feeling more pleasure than she had experienced for many a day; and to that the enlivening observations of Henry and his sister, served in no small measure to contribute.

For the time all the melancholy thoughts that had before tortured her, were banished from her mind, and she resigned herself completely to the festivities of the rustic scene before her.

And who joined more merrily in the sports than the worthy Mr. Stubbles and his amiable wife? Whose laugh was heard the loudest but theirs? And who more sincerely felt what they so strikingly and happily evinced?

It was really a treat to see them. They were the very personifications of honest good humour,—the life and the spirit of the jovial party.

Pity that moments of such truly rational enjoyment should be sadly interrupted. But so they were destined to be.

Suddenly a wild cry, proceeding from some person at no great distance, rent the air, thrilling through the brains of all present, and putting an instantaneous stop to the sports.

Upon Phoebe and her companions, that strange wild frantic cry, had a most extraordinary and painful effect, and they started to their feet, while their's and all eyes were directed towards that part from whence the dismal sound proceeded, and they awaited anxiously and fearfully to witness the result.

They were not kept in suspense for a moment. The cry was repeated, with even more thrilling effect than before, and immediately afterwards the form of a man, with arms extended, white hair flying loose and uncovered upon the evening breeze, and clothes disordered,—broke from amidst the green foliaged trees that grew so luxuriantly around, and rushing madly forward, like some affrighted deer, or as if he were propelled by a whirlwind, stood in the midst of the astonished and somewhat terrified assemblage.

An indescribable cry of agony escaped poor Phoebe, and she clung for support to Henry and his sister,—for it was her unfortunate father!

Yes, watching his opportunity when the keepers were otherwise engaged, the poor old man had made his escape from confinement, and, making the air resound again with his mad laughter, had rushed heedlessly along, with strange sagacity, carefully avoiding the village, where he was almost sure to have been stopped and secured, and leaping over ditches, and breaking through hedges—with the agility of a

youth, stopped not before he once more stood before that pretty cottage which had once formed his humble but happy home.

There he stood transfixed to the spot for a few moments in wild contemplation, then looked vacantly in at the window, and once more, laughing deliriously, resumed his flight, bending his course as if by instinct, in the direction of the Hazel Dell.

As he approached it, the merry strains of music, and the loud laughter of the rustic revellers had doubtless met his ears, and probably imagining in his madness, that it was the very night from which the commencement of all his sorrows was dated, he gave utterance to those frantic cries which had so startled and appalled those who heard them.

For a minute or two the persons in the Dell were so astonished and agitated by the sudden and unexpected appearance of the poor old man, that they could only gaze bewildered, and without attempting to interfere in order to secure him, and he rushed towards the spot where Phoebe and her companions were standing, calling wildly upon the name of his wife, and stretching forth his arms as though he saw her and wished to embrace her.

The keepers who had quickly discovered his escape, and hastened in pursuit, now appeared upon the spot, and immediately attempted to secure him, but he struggled violently, battling with them, and all who tried to render them any assistance, at the same time rending the air with frantic shrieks that were enough to terrify all who heard them.

And how shall we describe the agony of the hapless Phoebe at that trying moment!—we feel ourselves perfectly incapable of adequately doing so, and will therefore not attempt the task any more than to say that she could not speak, so overwhelming were her emotions, she could only throw herself on her knees before her maniac parent, and with clasped hands, look up in his aged face with an expression of anguish which spoke far more forcibly than language could possibly have done.

But with a loud exclamation of mingled shame, horror, and disgust he spurned her from him, and she fell back upon the ground insensible.

The unfortunate old man was then secured, Phoebe was raised in the arms of Henry Ashford, the rustics looked on in the deepest amazement and pity, then slowly, one by one, dispersed, and such was the melancholy termination of the joyous sports in the Hazel Dell.

CHAPTER XCIV.

THE ATTEMPTED SUICIDE OF LORD

SELBORNE,

LET the reader, (leaving our heroine again for a time), imagine a wild, cheerless, rocky scene, adjacent to a gloomy forest, in a certain part of the South of France,—the time, night; to this picture let him add a river, dark and murky, with a rude wooden bridge crossing it, and a waterfall dashing and plashing, and sending forth a monotonous, unpleasant sound, and he will form a pretty just conception of the place to which we now wish to draw his attention.

It was a scene well calculated to excite the most gloomy and morbid thoughts, and to prompt the guilty mind to deeds revolting.

We have said that the time to which we are now referring was night, and it was a night which was a night in perfect accordance with the dreary scene we have faintly described;—cold, dull, cheerless. The hour was about ten o'clock. There was no one to be seen, not a sound to be heard, save that of the waterfall, or the sullen murmuring of the wind at intervals, and that only increased the utter misery and chilling influence of all around.

But suddenly there appeared at one end of the bridge, the tall and somewhat commanding form of a man enveloped in a military cloak, with his head bent, his eyes cast downward, and apparently deeply immersed in thoughts of no very pleasurable description.

He walked slowly to the centre of the bridge, then stopped abruptly, slightly raised his head, and gazed vacantly into the dark waters beneath him.

In that attitude he remained for several minutes.

And who was this melancholy looking individual, the reader may now probably be anxious to know. We will immediately gratify his anxious curiosity.

It was the wretched wanderer, the conscience-stricken and penitent Lord Selborne.

But oh, how painfully changed in personal appearance, from the gay and handsome Lord Selborne as he was introduced to the reader at the commencement of our tale.

Anguish and remorse of mind, and dark despair had done their work, and left but a melancholy wreck of what was once so prepossessing.

His countenance had the haggard and

shrivelled appearance of an aged man, and there was an expression in those once brilliant eyes, that told the almost insupportable weight of care and anguish that loaded his breast, and pressed him down to the verge of the grave.

And long and dreary had been the unfortunate nobleman's wanderings, since he had quitted England, and fruitless all his efforts to obtain hope or consolation in the midst of the many sorrows by which he was afflicted.

The news of the daring robbery at his mansion in London, and the brutal murder of his faithful old butler had quickly reached him through the English papers, and, of course, served greatly to add to his melancholy and anguish of mind.

From place to place the wretched nobleman travelled, but could find no relief anywhere, and while residing at the house of a foreign gentleman with whom he had been for many years acquainted, the lady with which he had become afflicted assumed so violent and dangerous a form, that it was found necessary for a time, to put him under restraint, and it was greatly feared that he would never again be restored to reason. These apprehensions, however, were not realised; he did slowly so far recover, that it was considered safe for him to be released from confinement, and, after a time he once more resumed his gloomy wanderings.

Through these it is unnecessary, and it would at the same time only become tedious in us to follow him, so we will at once return to the scene in which we have just introduced him.

For some short time he stood in the same fixed and gloomy attitude on the bridge, and gazing earnestly down on the dark river, as if half disposed to plunge therein, and thus to terminate at once that wretched existence which had so long been to him a curse and a burthen.

Then he suddenly appeared to be aroused by some torturing thought, and striking his forehead with his clenched fist, he rushed madly across the bridge, and precipitately descending the rock on which it was supported, he advanced towards a tree whose long branches overhung the river, and leaning his back against its trunk, with his arms folded across his chest, and his hat pressed down over his eye-brows, he again became lost in dismal thought to everything around him.

Still all remained silent save the waterfall and the murmuring wind, and no person approached to observe or to interrupt him in his meditations, in which he continued

wrapped, without giving utterance to a word for several minutes.

But at length he startled, and stared wildly and vacantly around him, as if awakened from some frightful dream, and then in a voice whose accents told the bitter, the poignant anguish of his soul, he exclaimed:—

"And why does my coward soul shrink from at once terminating my miseries? Why do I longer permit myself to endure this worse than earthly perdition, when one determined blow would end all, and it soon would be forgotten that such a wretched guilty being as myself ever existed? It is but one plunge into those dark waters and all is over. Why should I hesitate? Even an eternity of horror cannot surely be worse than that which now I suffer."

As he then soliloquised, the expression of his countenance became truly awful, and his whole frame was violently and convulsively agitated by the intensity of his feelings.

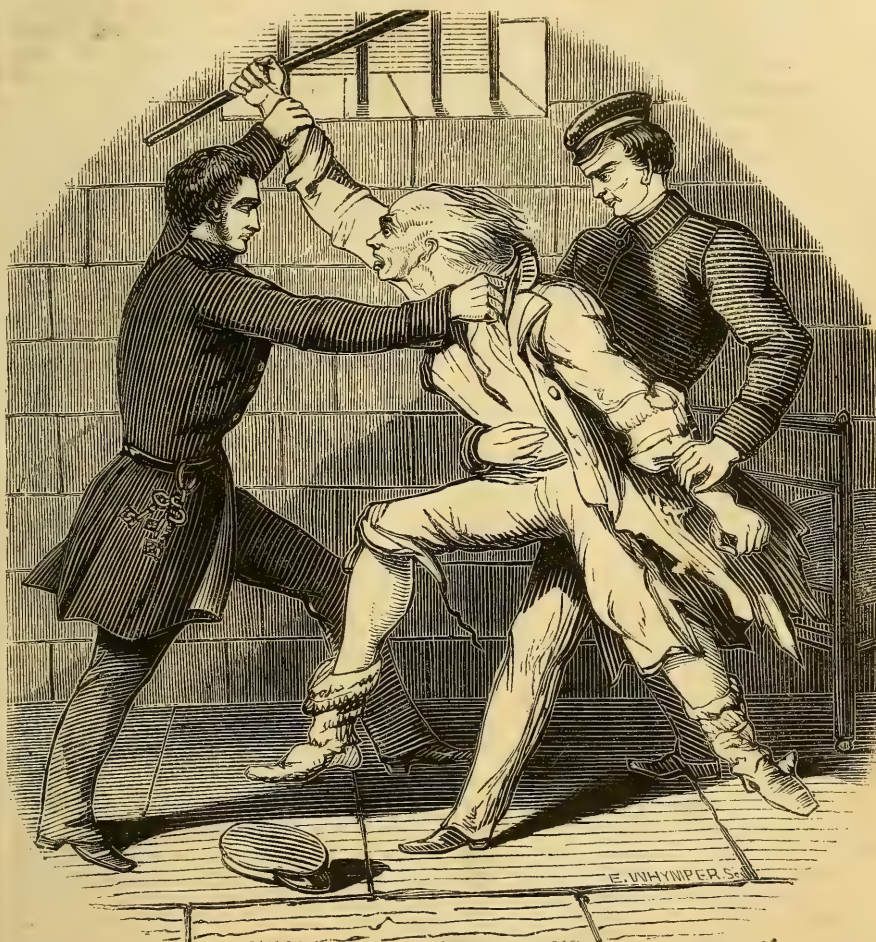
He moved hastily from the tree against which he had been leaning, and stood so on the extreme brink of the river, that the least tottering seemed likely to precipitate him into it.

For a moment—and a moment only, he gazed eagerly around him through the darkness, to see that no one was watching him, then throwing his arms above his head, and uttering a wild and piercing cry, he plunged headlong into the dark waters which opened to receive him.

It happened at that moment that some peasants were approaching near, on their way home, and they heard the mournful cry and the sound of the fatal plunge, and alarmed, but conjecturing truly what had happened, they hurried forward and arrived just at the time when the form of the unfortunate nobleman rose for the last time, and death must almost immediately have followed.

There was not an instant for hesitation and the peasants acted with becoming promptitude. One of them, who was a more skilful swimmer than his companions, immediately plunged into the river, and having succeeded in grasping the form of the hapless nobleman, with the assistance of his friends, brought him in a state of insensibility to the bank.

It seemed, however, at first too late, the vital spark appeared to be extinguished, but after having resorted to the proper means to eject all the water they possibly could from his inside, they discovered some faint signs of remaining life, but all chance of his complete restoration would be at an end,



unless immediate and proper assistance was procured.

Fortunately there was a village at no great distance, where a medical man resided, so raising the unfortunate nobleman in their arms they conveyed him thither with all possible expedition.

They were not long in arriving at the place of their destination, and his lordship having been immediately placed in bed and attended to with all the care that humanity could suggest, all the professional skill that the village could afford was promptly called in, and every means adopted for his recovery.

It was quite evident from his appearance, to those who had him under their care that he was a person of rank, and they felt some surprise that he should have been travelling on foot, and unattended by domestics, but

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they had no doubt that he had eluded them for the purpose of putting the rash act he had contemplated into execution.

On searching his clothes with the hope of finding something which might furnish them with the desired information, they quickly discovered who he was, and likewise the name of the hotel at which he had been last staying, and which was situated at no great distance from the wild and dreary place where he had attempted the act of suicide.

A messenger was therefore despatched to the hotel without delay, in order to inform his friends or servants of what had happened, and in the meantime they redoubled their exertions to restore him to consciousness.

This, however, for some time was unattended with the least success, and the medical

gentlemen were by no means sanguine as to his ultimate recovery.

At length William, the faithful domestic of Lord Selborne, who had been in a state of great alarm at his sudden and mysterious disappearance—on receiving the intelligence of the rash deed he had committed having lost no time in hastening from the hotel—arrived just as his unfortunate master had began to show some signs of returning life.

The honest domestic was much affected at the deplorable and dangerous condition in which he found his lordship, and could never be sufficiently thankful to the kind persons who had rescued him from the water, and he watched by his bedside with the utmost anxiety.

At last his lordship was so far restored as to be able to open his eyes, and to gaze in bewildered amazement around him, evidently quite unconscious of what had occurred, and what was the meaning of the strange and anxious faces he beheld.

It was some time ere William could succeed in making himself known, but at length his lordship did recognise him, and as he seemed to be awakened to all those horrors of remorse that had before tortured him, and driven him to seek a fearful and untimely death, his emotion and excitement became so great that the physicians in attendance upon him entertained the most serious apprehensions for the consequences.

In fact, madness distracted his brain, and it was to be feared that he would never more be completely restored to reason.

He remained in much the same melancholy condition for several days at the house to which he had been taken, for it was found impossible to remove him, and during that period his wild and dismal ravings and melancholy lamentations were quite piteous to listen to.

At length his unfortunate illness did take a favourable change, although his mind still wandered; he was able to leave his bed, and ultimately to be removed in a carriage to the hotel, where he had been staying for some days previous to the attempted suicide, and where he was more likely to receive that care and attention which his precarious situation required.

Here it seemed not at all improbable that he would be compelled to remain for some time, for it was impossible for him to resume his travels with any degree of safety in his present state.

His reason was restored, but still his mental sufferings were of the most violent and insupportable description, and it was too clear that his mind would never again experience any real or permanent relief.

"Oh, why did providence interpose to rescue me from the fate which I sought?" he

would soliloquise; "why recall me to life to have to endure this terrible earthly perdition? Why should a guilty, conscience-stricken wretch like myself whom all must loathe and despise, continue to live, to spread contamination around him where'er he wanders? Death, in any form however terrible, would have been a mercy to me, and have I not therefore every reason to curse those who snatched me from it? I have; and bitterly do I regret that they were enabled to do so. Oh, Phoebe, surely, deeply even as I have wronged you, did you but know the violence of my sufferings, the sincerity of my penitence, and how anxious I am to make atonement, you must feel some degree of pity for me, though I can never dare hope for your forgiveness. But no, if ever she does condescend to think of me, it must be with disgust and abhorrence, and to invoke the curses of heaven upon my guilty head. Torturing idea—it racks my fevered brain to madness."

Then he would further give vent to his agonising feelings in mournful lamentations and groans of anguish, and had it not been that he was strictly watched, and that every means of self destruction were removed, there could not have been the least doubt that in some of his frenzied moments, such as have been here faintly described, he would have been goaded to lay violent hands on himself.

There was another thought which greatly tortured the wretched nobleman, and that was the marriage of Henry Ashford and Phoebe, and which probably had even now taken place, and he could not reflect on that with any degree of patience, and without a feeling of dread, especially after the dark hints which the villain Beaufort had thrown out to him on a former occasion, and the mysterious observations and predictions of the old gipsy sybil.

Strange doubts and suspicions had long harrassed his mind, and which he found it impossible to banish, and the longer he indulged in them, the more deeply did he become involved in perplexity and fruitless conjecture.

At length, after the lapse of about three months, the health of Lord Selborne was sufficiently improved to suffer him to resume his travels, and being tired of the continent he resolved once more to return to England, and on his way there we will for the present leave him.

CHAPTER XCV.

THE FURTHER TRIALS OF PHOEBE.

We have fully described in a former chap-

ter, the exciting scene which took place in the Hazel Dell, on the sudden and unexpected appearance of poor old Mark Mayfield, and it may now be considered necessary to relate the result.

How remarkable and melancholy was the change which only a few short minutes had wrought in the aspect of that romantic place. The bright harvest moon smiled upon it as cheerfully as ever, and all around was calm and tranquil, but the sounds of joy and revelry which had so recently filled the air, and made each happy heart rebound were hushed; the smiling faces and light graceful forms that had moved so merrily in the mazes of the rustic dance had vanished, the unfortunate lunatic had with some difficulty been removed from the spot, and no one remained behind save Henry Ashford and his sister, the former supporting the insensible Phoebe in his arms, and gazing into her pale face with feelings of sympathy, regret, and anguish such as we need not attempt to describe.

He could not but anticipate the result of this terrible shock to Phoebe without feelings of dread, and whenever she might revive he was completely at a loss what to say which might afford her consolation.

Amy was as much affected as himself, and equally at a loss what to say or do to tranquillise the feelings of our heroine, or to counteract the effects that so torturing a scene was calculated to have upon her mind.

"Poor girl," said Henry, in accents of the deepest feeling, "will the time never arrive when her sorrows shall be at an end? Oh, surely she little deserved so cruel a fate as that which for years has pursued her, and the patience, fortitude, and resignation with which she has endured trials and vicissitudes that were sufficient to break many a stouter heart, are worthy of a better reward."

"True, dear Harry," coincided his sister, "and I trust that she will yet receive it in future happiness. But I cannot help now regretting that we were induced to visit the dell on this occasion."

"It is indeed to be regretted," remarked Harry, "but who could possibly have anticipated what has so unfortunately occurred? Poor Mark Mayfield, all hopes of his recovery, and of recognising and being reconciled to his daughter I fear are at an end."

"Alas, it does indeed appear so," replied Amy, "and my heart bleeds when I think of it. But come, Henry, let us away from this spot, and convey poor Phoebe home as quickly as possible, that we may see to her recovery."

"Henry was about to follow the advice of his sister, when a deep sigh from our heroine arrested him in his purpose.

"She revives," he said, "dear Phoebe, I—"

Before he could finish the sentence she opened her eyes, and after fixing them upon Henry and his sister for an instant, with an earnest and inquiring look, she glanced eagerly around the dell, and an exclamation of anguish escaped her on finding it deserted by all but themselves, and the recollection of all that had taken place rushed vividly and with overwhelming force upon her brain.

"Oh, God!" she exclaimed, with a burst of the most uncontrollable agony, "my poor father. Father—no, no, I dare not call him so. He has discarded me from his breast for ever; again he spurned me from him, as though I were something hateful and contaminating. I have no parent now, my own misconduct has deprived me of every parental blessing, and made a dreary barren waste of that poor old man's intellect, who once was so happy and contented in the affections of his good old dame and only child. Oh, I am a wretch unworthy to live, unfit to die."

The look of insupportable agony and despair which marked her features as she gave utterance to these melancholy words was quite heart-rending to behold, and Henry and his sister were so painfully shocked that for a moment or two they were deprived of the power of returning any reply, while the hapless Phoebe, unable to control the poignant anguish of her feelings, sobbed and wept and wrung her hands as though her heart would break.

"For the love of heaven, dear Phoebe," at length said Henry, in a voice of the greatest emotion, and with a look of gentle remonstrance, "forbear those melancholy and useless regrets, and bitter and unjust self-reproaches, for it tortures me far more than I can describe to listen to you. Even had you been half so guilty as you accuse yourself of being, the severe sufferings that you have had to undergo, and which you have with such fortitude and resignation endured, must be more than ample atonement."

"No, no," impatiently ejaculated our heroine; "in vain are all your arguments and persuasions. Conscience assures me how base has been my conduct, however much I may myself have been betrayed and deceived, and when I reflect upon the guilty past, and picture the utter ruin, misery, and desolation it has caused, I cannot but loathe and despise myself. Even you, Henry Ashford, and your amiable and gentle sister, should shun me, banish me from your presence, from your affections, for I am unworthy, totally unworthy of your love or sympathy."

"Dear Phoebe," said the gentle Amy in the most compassionate accents, and taking her hand affectionately in her own, "I pray

you do not thus terribly agitate and excite yourself. Oh, why will you persist in thus making use of such bitter observations, and self-reproaches, every word of which is a cruel libel on yourself? Come, try to tranquillise your feelings, I implore you, and let us return to the farm, for it is now getting late."

"Oh, no, I cannot," sighed our heroine, "some secret spell, some irresistible power seems to rivet me to this spot, and I fear to accompany you and your brother. Again I say you ought to despise me, shun me, as one who is unworthy of the pity or esteem of her fellow-creatures. Leave me, and let the wretched outcast resume her dreary wanderings o'er the wide and cheerless world."

"Leave you, shun you, hate and despise you, Phoebe," returned Henry, his manly heart moved to feelings of the deepest sorrow and regret, oh, surely your senses must wander, or you would not give utterance to language such as that you have just made use of. Think you so little of the fervour and sincerity of my love, as to imagine that any circumstance can ever alter the sentiments I entertain towards you—sentiments that have never ceased to glow within my breast from the earliest days of childhood? Oh, I should indeed hate and despise myself if I thought it could. No, Phoebe, you are my only hope, the bright beacon that lights and guides my soul to future happiness, and without you all would be utter misery, darkness, and despair."

"It must not, will not be, Henry," replied Phoebe, in the most melancholy accents; "fate is against us, and much as my heart acknowledges and appreciates your manly merits, and reciprocates your love, under all the dismal circumstances by which I am unfortunately surrounded, I can never, never become your wife."

"Cruel words," returned Henry, with a look that told more forcibly than language could possibly have done the anguish that filled his bosom, "oh, Phoebe, little did I think you capable of giving utterance to them. Alas, must then all those bright hopes which I so fondly cherished be thus sadly blighted, and that, too, when I thought their speedy realisation certain? I am now indeed a wretched being, for I am convinced—too fatally convinced that Phoebe Mayfield, her for whose welfare I would willingly have laid down my life, could never have loved me."

Grief choked his further utterance, and he pressed his hand in the extreme and insupportable anguish of his feelings upon his forehead, and for the moment his senses appeared to wander.

Our heroine looked at him for a second or two with an expression of countenance which

no language could describe, tears gushed from her eyes, her lips quivered, and a tempest of contending emotions swelled her bosom, and at length, in a violent paroxysm which she could no longer restrain, she sunk in his arms, and again became almost insensible.

Need we say how deeply the susceptible heart of Amy was affected at this scene? But for a few minutes she did not attempt to interrupt them, feeling assured that by giving free vent to their feelings they would be enabled to obtain some relief.

"Endeavour to calm yourselves, Phoebe, and Henry," she at last ejaculated, in her gentlest and most persuasive accents, "and to return home; again I say that this is neither the time nor the place to give indulgence to such emotions as those that now so powerfully agitate your breasts. Let us depart without delay."

Phoebe and her lover looked at her earnestly for a moment, but made no reply, and Henry taking an arm of each they moved slowly from the deserted Hazel Dell towards the pathway which led to their dwelling.

The various emotions that agitated them after the painful events of the evening and the scene which we have just described, would not suffer them now to enter into conversation, and they proceeded on their way in silence till they had got within sight of the farm, when an exclamation of alarm from Phoebe startled Henry and his sister, and at the same time they felt her tremble violently, and saw that her eyes were fixed with terror upon some object which they seemed to have encountered.

Their eyes followed in the same direction as that which occupied her attention, and the agitation which she exhibited no longer caused them any surprise.

Again that mysterious being, that certain harbinger of evil, who had so frequently crossed their path—the old gipsy sybil—stood before them, her small piercing eyes fixed upon them with an unnatural expression, and her repulsive features revealed ghastly in the moonlight, and frightfully distorted with nameless passions.

In spite of all his efforts to the contrary, Henry Ashford could not but experience an almost unaccountable and irresistible feeling of dread at the sight of this singular old woman, and her appearance at such a time, when Phoebe in particular was so little prepared to see her, was most painful and annoying.

The sybil appeared to enjoy their emotion, for a malicious grin overspread her face, and she approached them nearer, until she stood within a few paces of them, and glaring full upon them.

Still she offered not to speak, and Henry

and his fair companions were too much confused and agitated to do so for some minutes but at last Henry in an indignant and peremptory tone demanded—

"Impudent imposter, what brings you hither now? If it is again to seek to create alarm by your idle predictions, you may as well abandon your designs and begone, lest even your age should not protect you from that chastisement which such conduct deserves."

Our heroine could not help trembling at the boldness of his words, fearing that they might excite the wrath of the singular and mysterious intruder, and she timidly clung closer to her lover and his sister.

A truly frightful expression overspread the unnatural features of the sybil at the observations of Henry, and even he could hardly help shrinking with some degree of terror, and awaited her reply with anxiety and impatience.

He had not to wait long.

"Daring boy," said the hag, in a voice even more harsh and discordant than usual, "and so you not only affect to despise me and the power I possess—obstinate sceptic as you are—but presume to threaten. Beware, you know not the being whom you thus seek to provoke, or the danger that may accrue to yourself and those who are dear to you."

"I defy and scorn both you and your boasted power," returned Henry, haughtily; "some feeling of malice for which I am at a loss to account—for it is quite unprovoked—must guide your extraordinary conduct, but neither am I to be intimidated by it, or will submit to it; I therefore caution you once more to begone, and to reserve your idle and ridiculous prophecies for those who are weak and superstitious enough to place any confidence in them."

As Henry gave utterance to these observations, he drew the arm of the alarmed Phoebe and Amy closer within his own, and then attempted to pass the old woman, but she stood more boldly and immediately before them, and assuming a more menacing attitude, prevented them from doing so, and after indulging in a loud and scornful laugh which resounded far around, she said—

"'Tis well—'tis well; the powerless and the ignorant dare to threaten, and they must take the consequences. Oh, foolish and headstrong boy, you little know the sorrows, the sufferings, and the disappointments that are yet in store for yourself and that fair but wretched being by your side, whose cheek is blanched with terror, ere your bitter cup of woe shall be filled to the brim. Fresh clouds of adversity are still gathering in the horizon that will shortly burst over your devoted heads, and then when it is too late, you may no longer treat with scorn and defiance the

predictions of the gipsy sybil. Dare not to unite yourself to one who cannot become your wife without plunging herself into crime which will bring down the vengeance of the law upon you both. Remember my words, disobey my warning, treat my prognostications with scorn, and tremble."

The last words were spoken with peculiar emphasis, and a marked expression of features, that struck awe to poor Phoebe and Amy, and which even Henry—in spite of the firmness and indifference he had assumed—could not witness without a sensation of uneasiness bordering upon dread and mis-giving.

But without giving either of them time to make any reply, the extraordinary old woman turned quickly away from the spot, after fixing upon them a look of malice which was not likely soon to be forgotten, and gliding, rather than walking away, immediately vanished from their sight in the darkness and obscurity beyond, leaving them in a state of agitation—particularly our heroine which may be readily conjectured.

Without saying a word, Henry Ashford hurried them from the spot, and they soon arrived at the farm, where Phoebe sank overpowered on a seat, and gave free indulgence to the painful and bewildering thoughts that crowded so rapidly on her brain.

CHAPTER XCVI.

A DESPERATE STRUGGLE.

It was some time ere either our heroine or her companions could sufficiently collect themselves or regain their composure to discuss the remarkable and startling events of that memorable evening, and when they did do so, the nature of their discourse may be easily imagined; the scene with her unfortunate father, in particular, having made an impression upon Phoebe which nothing whatever could possibly eradicate; every wild word that he had uttered in his madness, every look, every gesture, being stamped upon her memory in characters that nothing could efface, and which racked his brain, and made her heart bleed to think of.

Henry and his sister, as might be expected exerted themselves to the utmost to impart consolation to her, but it was with little success that they did so, and, in fact, they were too much agitated themselves to have the power to accomplish their desire.

But nothing could possibly abate the terrible anxiety of poor Phoebe, till she ascertained what had happened to the poor old man after he had been forced from the dell, and his present condition, although she

had but too much reason to apprehend the worst.

Henry therefore in obedience to her wishes and to gratify his own and his sister's anxiety, immediately despatched one of his most intelligent and confidential servants to the house of Mr. Stubbles to obtain the desired information.

But not the least torturing circumstance of the evening to Phoebe was the meeting with the extraordinary and mysterious old woman who had so frequently appeared before her under similar circumstances, and the more she pondered over the observations she had made use of, and the torturing and ambiguous warnings and menaces to which she had given utterance, the farther did she become lost in perplexity and useless conjecture.

"Again, my dearest Phoebe," said Henry, in reply to some remarks upon the bewildering subject which had fallen from her, "I must beg of you to try to treat the observations of this impudent old imposter with the contempt they merit, and not to suffer her mad and preposterous predictions to make any serious impression upon your mind. Alarming as they may at first appear to be, they are unworthy of a second thought."

"True," remarked Amy, "and what her motives can be for entertaining the malicious feelings she appears to do towards us, and for seeming to take delight in annoying and alarming us at every opportunity, I cannot imagine. The only charitable construction that I can put upon her conduct is that she must be mad."

"Ah, no," returned our heroine, with a shudder, "in spite of all that you have said, and every argument you can make use of, it is impossible that I can look upon her fearful warnings so lightly, or forget the extraordinary manner in which the threats and prophecies she uttered have been realised to the very letter. Even now I tremble with a feeling of instinctive horror when I think of them."

"Such continual annoyance, and such mysterious behaviour," said Henry, after a minute or two's reflection, "is most intolerable, and I am determined, if possible to discover who this woman is. In the meantime, dear Phoebe, I beg of you to banish this adventure from your recollection, and to look forward to the future with hope and confidence."

Our heroine shook her head doubtfully, and was about to make some reply, when she was prevented from doing so by the return of the man who had been sent to inquire after the condition of her father, and who brought a letter from Mr. Stubbles in which he informed them of all they wished to know.

From this letter—which Phoebe listened to with the most painful anxiety while her lover perused it—it appeared that after the first determined struggle which had taken place on the poor old man's capture in the Hazel Dell, he became exhausted, and was removed in safety, and without any further resistance, to the house of Mr. Stubbles, and placed in his old apartment, where every humane care and attention was shown to him, and at that time he was comparatively calm, and gave no symptoms of suffering any relapse for the present into his late state of violent excitement.

This intelligence was a great relief to our heroine's mind, and that of Henry and his sister, and they returned their thanks to heaven for the same, and implored its merciful interposition for the unfortunate old man for the future.

But it was not likely that Phoebe could easily divest her mind of the gloomy impression caused by the painful events of the night, and on her and Amy separating from Henry and retiring to their chamber, they remained some time discussing the melancholy subject before they sought their bed, but without being able to come to any satisfactory conclusion, although Amy exerted herself to the utmost to dismiss the dismal reflections which the remarkable circumstances naturally engendered; and the same pursued her in imagination in her dreams.

The following morning she expressed her determination to visit the house of Mr. Stubbles, that she might personally observe the condition of her afflicted parent, which she might do, as she had before, without being seen by him herself.

Henry and his sister would fain have dissuaded her from this, as they feared the excitement it might cause her, but it was in vain that they tried to do so, and they therefore persuaded her to allow them to accompany her.

It was with heavy and foreboding hearts that Phoebe and her companions entered the mansion of the worthy Mr. Stubbles, who received them with his usual friendship and kindness, and expressed in his own simple and honest way his regret at the melancholy and unforeseen circumstance which had put so abrupt and painful a termination to the festivities in the Hazel Dell on the previous evening.

This brought them to the melancholy business for which they had come to the house, and to the anxious inquiries of our heroine, Mr. Stubbles replied that the unfortunate Mark, shortly after his return to the house, by great care, and the skilful remedies applied by his physician, and no doubt worn out by the extraordinary exertions he had undergone, had become calm,

as he informed them in his letter, and gradually sunk off to sleep, from which he did not awaken till the morning, and that all signs of further violence had for the present disappeared.

It is needless to say how thankful Phoebe was to hear this, and how sincerely her and her friends prayed to heaven that it might continue, and that after all the poor afflicted old man might be restored to that reason of which he had so long been deprived.

"Unfortunate father," sighed our heroine, while tears trembled in her eyes, and her bosom heaved with the violent emotions that agitated it, "most willingly would your wretched daughter yield up her life, could she by doing so, be the means of restoring you to your senses, and to that happiness to which you have so long been a stranger. But, alas, I fear that can never be, and the thought makes my heart sicken, and absorbs every other feeling in that of black despair."

Her friends would fain have endeavoured to raise her hopes, but under all the painful circumstances as they at present were, and considering the length of time that her father had been afflicted with the fatal malady, they felt that it would not only be useless but cruel to do so, as it was but too probable that hopes so raised could only turn out to be delusive, and end in bitter disappointment.

"Oh, she again sighed, after a brief pause, "could he but recognise me, if only for a moment, and utter one kind word to me, call me daughter, and press me once more with parental affection to his heart, what heavenly consolation would it be to me, what a blissful reward for all the troubles I have experienced, methinks I could then be content to die."

"I implore you, my own dear Phoebe," said her lover, deeply affected, "talk not thus sadly, for it racks my heart to hear you. Heaven, I trust, in its infinite mercy, has many years of life and happiness in store for you, and that the time will come, when not only the clouds that have so long darkened the horizon of your destiny shall have dispersed, and the bright sunshine of peace succeeded, but that you may have learned to look back upon the dreary past merely as a painful dream, or to bury it for ever in oblivion."

"Would to God that I could believe so," returned our heroine, fervently, "but I dare not, must not venture to encourage such sanguine and flattering thoughts and feelings. As for happiness, how is it possible that I can ever again experience it while my unfortunate parent remains in his present deplorable state of mind, and till I have heard that blessed word forgiveness pass his lips?"

Again her tears flowed fast as those dismal

reflections occurred to her, and Henry and his sister knew not what to say, what arguments to make use of that might arouse her from the utter state of despondency in which her spirits were sunk, whilst the warm-hearted Mr. Stubbles and his equally amiable and simple partner, looked on with much sympathy, and listened with deep interest to all that was said.

"I know, Miss Phoebe," remarked Mr. Stubbles, "that you will believe me when I say that there is no one who wishes yourself and your poor father better than I do, and I do trust that those wishes will be some day, and that before long too, realised and that all will be well."

"My excellent friend," replied Phoebe, in tones that told the warmth and sincerity of her feelings, "I should indeed despise myself could I for a moment doubt the truth of that which you have just now said, did I not fully appreciate the generous feelings you entertain towards myself and my unfortunate father. Oh, what a vast debt of gratitude do I not owe you for the manifold kindnesses that I have experienced at your hands, the unexpected humanity that you have ever evinced towards the poor afflicted sufferers? I am lost for words adequately to express my feelings; may heaven bless and reward you for it is impossible that I can ever do so."

"Don't talk so, Miss Phoebe, to a plain simple man like myself," said Mr. Stubbles, "for I feel it is more than I deserve. Lor' bless you, I have done no more than my duty, and when I can forget to do that, as far as is in my power, towards my fellow creatures, why set me down as no man at all, and never call me Giles Stubbles again."

"Right, right, old man," observed his wife, her good-humoured countenance glowing with the kindly feelings that prompted her words, "and I do love you all the better for what you have said, for I know it comes from your heart. Why, bless you, Miss Phoebe, there is nothing that myself and my husband would not do to serve you; for haven't we known you ever since you were a little child not so high, and a pretty playful little thing you were too, with such rosy cheeks, and bright blue eyes, that used to sparkle like two stars, and beautiful flaxen hair, that used to fall in ringlets finer than any silk, over your neck and shoulders. Ah, and many's the time that we have taken you into the green fields and helped to fill your lap with the pretty wild flowers, and listened with such pleasure to your merry laugh, as you sported over the fields and meadows in the sunshine hunting the golden butterfly. Oh, Miss Phoebe, you were indeed a happy child then, and I can almost fancy that I see you now as plainly as you were at that time, as if it were only yesterday."

These reminiscences of the happy days of her childhood were too much for the feelings of our heroine in her present state of mind, and she burst into tears, which she had no power to restrain.

"Oh, bright, sunny days of innocence and joy," she sighed, "fated, alas, never more to return. Would that it had pleased heaven then to take me to itself, when sin and care, and sorrow were unknown to me."

"Nay, Miss Phoebe," said the worthy Mr. Stubbles, who, notwithstanding that he fully concurred in the sentiments which his wife had expressed, could not help thinking that they were somewhat mistimed, "nay, Miss Phoebe," he repeated, "you must not talk thus sadly, for I do trust that the time is not far distant when you will be restored to all that happiness you enjoyed at the period my wife has described, and which is the reward for years of suffering to which your virtues justly entitle, and which providence, depend upon it, will not fail to bestow upon you."

"Henry and his sister pressed the hands of the excellent Mr. Stubbles in acknowledgement of their sense of the kindness and generosity of heart towards the fair being whom they both so sincerely and warmly loved, which prompted the observations he had made use of, and our heroine whose breast was agitated by various contending emotions, looked the thanks which her tongue, at the moment, was powerless to speak.

A short time having been given for her to recover herself, Phoebe expressed a strong desire, as she had done to Henry and Amy, to see her heavily afflicted father, after the recent melancholy and exciting event in the Hazel Dell.

Mr. Stubbles and his wife, agreeing with Henry Ashford and his sister, would fain have dissuaded her from this painful trial to her feelings, but finding that she was determined, he immediately yielded to her request and sent for one of the persons who had charge of the poor old man, to consult how the same could be best arranged without causing that excitement which was so much to be apprehended to both parties.

We think it has been before stated, that, by the advice of his medical attendant, the unfortunate Mark Mayfield in his calmer moments, and properly watched, had been allowed to wander in the beautiful grounds attached to the hospitable mansion of Mr. Stubbles, with the hope that such healthful exercise might do more towards his recovery than anything else.

In fact, it is almost unnecessary to state, that the least possible restraint was placed upon him, consistent with the various stages and changes of his malady. The apartment

in which he was confined, and which was situated in one of the most healthful parts of the building, being fitted up with every regard to comfort and convenience, the only thing appertaining to it, which could give it the appearance of a place of confinement, and which was an absolute indispensable precaution, being the fact that the windows were barred.

The keeper on making his appearance gave a very satisfactory account of the present state of the unfortunate patient. After the excellent and tranquil night's rest which he had enjoyed, all symptoms of the violence of the previous evening in the Hazel Dell had vanished, and it had been proposed by the physician, especially as the morning was particularly fine, that he should be indulged in the healthy recreation before spoken of, and therefore a better opportunity for Phoebe to gratify her melancholy desire, could not have been presented.

The keeper was despatched with the necessary instructions to conduct the patient from his apartment at a certain time, and Phoebe was then escorted by her friends to the grounds before mentioned.

Nothing could be more tasteful or picturesque than the arrangement of these beautiful grounds or gardens, and at any time they formed a delightful scene of enjoyment, particularly as from different points the eye might luxuriate on some of the most romantic and diversified scenery in that part of the country.

There were the shady avenues of stately trees, through which to perambulate, fountains playing and cooling the air in different directions, and rich parterres of flowers at every turn.

The air indeed in that delightful place was redolent of perfume, almost realising a scene of oriental beauty, and reflecting great credit on the liberality as well as the taste of the plebeian Mr. Stubbles, under whose immediate superintendence all the arrangements had been made.

In one part of these grounds was a small summer house, so situated that from it an almost uninterrupted view of everything around was commanded, and it was to this that our heroine and her friends were conducted, a few minutes previous to poor old Mark Mayfield being led from his apartment.

Seating themselves in a convenient part of this summer house, Phoebe and her companions awaited with the utmost anxiety the appearance of the afflicted object of their solicitude, and they had not to wait long.

Presently he entered one of the principal walks, near one end of which the summer house was situated, and walking as leisurely and calmly as any person in their rational senses would do.



How the heart of Phoebe palpitated when she beheld him, and what mingled emotions of reverence, sorrow, and regret agitated her breast. She could not restrain the expression of her feelings, heavy sobs escaped her swelling bosom, and her eyes filled with tears.

She could have rushed forth and thrown herself on his bosom, breathing forth her whole soul in prayers and supplications for forgiveness, and forgetting the darkness which so unhappily enshrouded his benighted intellect.

But she could scarcely believe the extraordinary change which only a few short hours had wrought in his appearance. It was indeed a change for the better, and she could not, for the moment, but indulge in the fond hope that it would continue, and

that before long he would be completely restored to reason.

Similar thoughts occupied the minds of Harry and his sister, although they did not express them, and they watched the ill-fated Mark as he advanced along the walk with the deepest interest and anxiety.

Slowly he approached in the direction of the summer house, sometimes with his head bent towards the earth as if deeply wrapped in thought, and at others raised upwards, with a look of serenity and joy, as though he saw in the clear blue vault of heaven some sweet angelic face smiling down upon him. Then he would pause and gaze upon the lovely scene, and laugh and dance in the wildness of his delight, and probably with the sense of the blessings of liberty—for a time being free from restraint.

The heart of poor Phoebe was full to bursting as she watched him, and thought of the content and happiness he once enjoyed, previous to her elopement, and the terrible sufferings it had since been his hard lot to have to undergo; and in those painful feelings it need scarcely be said that her friends fully participated.

He came to one of the richest of the parterres, for a moment he stood and gazed at its various beauties with rapt attention, then after gathering some of the fairest, and destroying them as soon as he had gathered them by tearing the petals away, and casting them on the ground, he laughed wildly, and stepping into the midst of the flowery bed, he commenced shouting and dancing in mad glee, trampling everything under foot, the more he destroyed, the greater appeared to be his delight, till the keepers approached, when he suddenly ceased his mad antics, and assumed a demeanour towards them as humble and submissive as that of a child.

This scene affected our heroine more than all, and unable to control her feelings, she sighed:—

"Oh, God! what torture is this to a daughter's heart, especially that wretched, guilty daughter who knows that it is her, and her alone who has caused this awful wreck of one of the most affectionate of parents, and the best of men. Dare I contemplate this fearful spectacle and still retain my senses? Father, unfortunate father well may the sight of her who so cruelly deceived you, excite your utmost hatred, disgust, and horror."

"Phoebe, my poor Phoebe," said Henry, "you surely know not what you say, I pray you give not way to these wild emotions, but endeavour to watch the actions of your afflicted father with calmness, though you cannot I know, do so without sorrow."

Phoebe only sighed and shook her head, but returned no other answer, for her whole attention was rivetted on her unhappy parent, who still approached towards the summer-house, at a quicker and more uneven pace, until he had arrived so near that she could have a distinct view of every expression of his features, and it almost broke her heart to gaze upon the venerable countenance of that parent whom she had ever so fondly loved, but whom in an unguarded and fatal moment she had deceived and abandoned to misery, despair, and ultimate hopeless insanity.

At first the poor old man's eyes were so intent on other objects that he did not seem to observe the summer house, prominent though it was, with the thickly clustering honeysuckle climbing and entwining around it. But at length his attention was drawn towards it, and no sooner did he behold it,

than he clapped his hands, laughed, shouted aloud, and exhibited other signs of extravagant delight.

For a minute he paused and gazed at it with intense curiosity, then rushed hastily towards it till he had arrived within a few paces of it, when he again stopped, and seemed to hesitate whether or not to enter it.

The heart of our heroine throbbed more violently than ever, and she prepared herself for an exciting scene which seemed inevitably about to ensue.

Henry and his sister also felt the greatest anxiety, and could not but regret that Phoebe should have persisted in visiting the mansion of Mr. Stubbles for the present, at any rate.

The keepers, who were some distance behind, seeing that the old man was likely to enter the summer-house, and fearing the consequences, hurried forward to prevent him, but before they could reach the spot, with a wild laugh he darted forward, and in the next instant he stood before his distracted daughter and her companions, and glaring upon them in wild and stupefied amazement, whilst our heroine was rivetted to the spot, and could scarcely refrain from giving utterance to an exclamation of agony.

The keepers arrived at the entrance of the summer-house, but observing the excitement of all present, hesitated to interfere.

For a moment the old man did not seem to recognise any one distinctly, but at length his eye fell upon the pale face of his daughter and as it did so, a terrible change came over the expression of his features, and he started back a few paces, as though something appalling had met his sight, while his whole frame seemed to be violently agitated by some sudden and convulsive emotion.

Phoebe could contain herself no longer, but before her lover could offer to interfere to prevent her, she rushed forward and throwing herself on her knees before her father, in the same piteous accents in which she had addressed him since she had seen him in his madness, she exclaimed:—

"Father, beloved father, oh, in mercy, unless you would see me dead at your feet look not so fearfully upon me, but may the light of reason once more dawn upon your senses, and enable you to recognise and acknowledge me. It is your once loved Phoebe, your penitent, distracted child who addresses you, and could weep tears of blood, could she but hear one kindly, one rational word from you."

"Mockery, mockery again," exclaimed the unfortunate old man, in accents that thrilled through the very hearts of all present, "it be the venomous snake which ha' stung the o'd man's peace o' mind for ever, an' would now again coil around his heart, or steal its way to his maddened brain! It be mockery

I do say again, there be no pretty modest flowers to fill the air wi' fragrance now, but ev'rything do breathe o' poison. Ha! ha! ha! dost thee think the o'd man mad, that thou wouldest seek to persuade him that fair modest lily which he had planted in his bosom, an' near his heart, still bloomed in all its innocence, and beauty? Liar, imposter, away, I be not mad, and therefore am not to be deluded by a guilty, shameless wanton like thou be'est, away! away!"

He clenched his fist, and would, in the wild paroxysm of his madness, doubtless have struck her, had not the keepers interposed, and securing his arms, forced him away, he making the air resound again with his fearful ravings as they did so, and in vain trying to release himself from their hold.

Our heroine remained on her knees, paralysed and horror-struck till Henry raised her from her supplicant attitude, and ventured to address some affectionate words of consolation to her, but she turned upon him a look of agony and despair that appalled him, as she thus mournfully ejaculated:—

"Oh, forbear, forbear, all words of consolation are but sounds of mockery in mine ears, again has he uttered the fearful words that must henceforth ring for ever like the dismal knell of death in mine ears, once more has he cast me with scorn and loathing from him, and there is nothing left for me but black despair. Oh, that this too stubborn heart would break, and terminate those miseries that have long been insupportable."

She burst into a flood of tears as she uttered these melancholy words, and Henry was too much affected himself to make any reply or to offer to interrupt her.

In the meantime poor old Mark Mayfield had been reconducted to the house in a state of great excitement, and it was found necessary to keep a strict watch over him to prevent him from doing himself any mischief.

After a few minutes, and when they had given themselves sufficient time to a certain extent to recover themselves, Phoebe and her friends also returned to the house, where they remained for an hour or two discussing the painful events, just recorded, when they retraced their steps to the farm, Phoebe considerably more depressed in spirits than she had been before.

* * * *

Our heroine now saw the utter hopelessness and even danger of her attempting by any appeal she could make, to restore her unfortunate father to reason, and to bring about that reconciliation upon which her sole hopes of future happiness depended, and, trying as it was to her feelings, she was therefore compelled to leave it to chance.

She visited the house of Mr. Stubbles al-

most daily to inquire after the health of her father, but she never saw him only from such a situation, and when he was asleep, as rendered it most unlikely he could observe her, and that privilege certainly afforded her some melancholy satisfaction or consolation.

And thus several days elapsed, and the poor old man had again become calm, though there were no more signs of returning reason than ever.

And now another event of an exciting nature, which we will proceed at once to relate, was about to occur.

We have before somewhat minutely described the room in which Mark Mayfield was confined. Adjoining it was the chamber in which the two keepers slept, for it was not considered necessary to watch him night and day when not violent. From this they could come immediately on any alarm.

One morning early, about a week after the occurrence which we have described in the previous pages, the keepers were aroused by a strange noise of shouts and laughter proceeding from the patient's apartment, and although that was not very unusual, they had their suspicions that something was wrong, and hastily dressing themselves, they entered the room, when a sight presented itself which somewhat excited their astonishment and alarm.

Poor old Mark, by what means they could not at the time imagine, had contrived to remove one of the iron bars from the window and had already destroyed several articles of furniture, and was now engaged in battering the walls of the room, laughing aloud and triumphantly at every fresh blow he dealt.

The keepers thought to take him by surprise, and to rush upon him, and secure him before he could do any further mischief, but with the quick sense of hearing common to insane persons, he immediately became aware of their presence, and turning fiercely upon them with threatening looks, brandished the formidable weapon with which he had armed himself in the most alarming manner.

The keepers were at first rather dismayed, for they had nothing to defend themselves with, and the maniac having sufficient sagacity to perceive this, became more desperate, swinging the iron-bar about him right and left, and smashing everything that came in the way, at the same time laughing and shouting aloud in exultation.

He advanced towards them in a menacing attitude, and finding that it would be dangerous to attempt to disarm him without assistance, they retreated to the door with that intention, the unfortunate man following them, and aiming a terrible blow at them, which they narrowly escaped, as they did so.

Having made good their escape from the

room, the keepers secured the door after them, and then hastened to give the alarm.

They soon returned, accompanied by Mr. Stubbles and two or three of his male servants, and they then heard the madman battering at the door, which was fortunately a strong one, and trying to force it open.

They consulted with themselves for a few moments, what it was best to do, in order to secure the poor old man without danger to themselves, and while they did so, they heard the iron bar drop from his hands, and then himself fall heavily on the floor, no doubt exhausted with his extraordinary exertions.

Now, therefore, was the moment for action and hastily opening the door, they beheld the unfortunate maniac extended on the floor, in a state of insensibility, and the iron-bar, with which he had done much damage in the room, demolishing everything that came in his way, and scarcely leaving an article of furniture uninjured.

He was immediately removed to another room, more secure, and being placed in bed, was quickly attended upon by the medical gentleman under whose skilful treatment he was, and who pronounced a very unfavourable opinion of him, which Mr. Stubbles and his wife were extremely sorry to hear, not only for the poor old man's sake himself but that of his hapless daughter, who it appeared quite certain, could not much longer even with all her fortitude and powers of endurance, bear up against those repeated and severe shocks.

Having given instructions for every care and attention to be paid to the ill-fated patient, Mr. Stubbles left the house, and made his way to the farm, to make known the melancholy event to our heroine and her friends.

The grief with which they heard it, may readily be imagined, Phoebe, in fact, being quite distracted, and perfectly inconsolable, while Henry and his sister were scarcely less affected.

They all immediately accompanied Mr. Stubbles back to his mansion, where they learn with grief that the alarming condition of the wretched old man had rather increased than abated, and that it had been found necessary to adopt the strictest measures in order to keep him under proper restraint, and to prevent him from doing injury to himself and others.

How great, how insupportably great was now the anguish of poor Phoebe, and she turned a deaf ear to the words of consolation which Henry and Amy were so ill able to give her.

How anxious was she to see him, nay to watch by his bedside, to attend upon him, and to do everything that nature and affection could dictate towards his recovery; but,

of course, that could not be allowed, and she was therefore compelled to yield, though most reluctantly to the advice of her friends.

Day after day elapsed, and poor Mark Mayfield became worse instead of better, so that those who felt so deep an interest in his fate had the most dismal prospect before them.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BENIGHTED TRAVELLERS.—THE STORM.

It was on a gloomy cheerless night, at the latter end of September, that a gentleman of melancholy and careworn appearance, followed by a servant, were riding through a dismal forest in one of the northern districts of England, and which had become notorious from the number of fearful crimes that had been perpetrated in it.

These travellers, who were benighted, were Lord Selborne and the faithful William.

His Lordship had been in England more than a week, but in consequence of the state of his health, had been staying at a retired hotel, with the hope of being able in some measure to recruit himself.

The state of the wretched nobleman's mind was much the same as when we last left him, and, in fact, he had now become the victim to a settled despair, and was perfectly indifferent as to what befell him, or whether he lived or died. His appearance, as has been before intimated, perfectly corresponded with those feelings, and few persons who had known him but a few years back, could have recognised in him the then handsome and gay young nobleman who captivated all who fell into his society by the urbanity and vivacity of his manners, and who possessed such a powerful and dangerous influence over the hearts of the fair sex.

With his usual eccentricity of conduct of late, his departure from the hotel at which he had been staying was very abrupt, and declining the use of a travelling carriage, although it was at a late hour in the evening, and the weather was most unfavourable.

Both himself and his servant being totally unacquainted with the road, continued to ride leisurely and carelessly on, till they at length found themselves, at rather an advanced hour of the night, entangled in the mazes of the before mentioned forest, and the more they tried to extricate themselves, the deeper did they become involved and bewildered in its intricacies.

The weather, too, continued to become more and more threatening, and this added to the misery of their situation, but his lordship was too busily occupied with his own

torturing and gloomy thoughts to take any heed of it, and he rode moodily on, caring not whither he went or what might become of him.

At length William riding up to him and venturing to arouse him from his lethargy of thought, said—

"A storm has been long threatening, my lord, but it is now coming, that's certain."

"What of that?" demanded his master, haughtily and testily.

"Pardon me, your lordship, for my boldness," replied William, "but I venture to say, in our present bewildering situation, benighted in this gloomy forest, with no more prospect of being able to extricate ourselves than we had at first, that is very unfortunate."

"Bah," exclaimed his lordship, laconically and impatiently, and he rode on, William not daring to address any further observation to him, but feeling far from pleased at the gloomy prospect before them.

The servant of Lord Selborne was quite right in his calculation, for the storm soon afterwards commenced with that violence which threatened shortly to swell into fury, and even his lordship could not but take some notice of it, but he quickly relapsed into his previous state of silence and indifference.

The storm soon showed itself in all its might, the angry elements waging fierce war, with each other, and wind and rain, thunder and lightning struggling for supremacy.

And still they seemed as far off getting out of the forest as ever.

For some minutes longer the travellers continued on their dreary way, the raging tempest continuing to increase every moment in violence, and the war of elements becoming at last truly terrific.

At length they broke through the more closely entangled part of the forest, and came upon a more comparatively open space, but here the misery of their situation was by no means diminished, for they were more exposed to the storm, and quickly drenched to the skin.

William was again about to venture to address himself to his master, and to throw out some suggestions that might have been of service, when a fearful flash of lightning followed by a deafening peal of thunder, blazed immediately across their path, and the horse which his lordship rode, frightened, reared, and then before William could try to prevent it, darted off with the speed of the whirlwind, and quickly became unmanageable.

William was greatly alarmed, and goading his horse to the top of its speed, followed in pursuit, but as it appeared without the least chance of overtaking him, for at every

ucceeding flash of the lightning, the affrighted animal increased its wild speed, tearing up the earth with its hoofs, still dashing madly, and more madly on, over the fallen trunks of trees, up the steepest hills, down the deepest valley's, through lake or streamlet, leaping hedge and ditch, through copse, on to a wild heath, still dashing on, suffering nothing to obstruct it in its flight of terror, while its unfortunate rider, whose senses were in a whirl of confusion, swayed backwards and forwards in the saddle, seeming almost helpless, and likely to be dashed to the earth every moment.

William, it need scarcely be said, although he goaded the spirited horse he rode into its utmost speed, quickly lost sight of his unfortunate master, and even the sound of the affrighted animal's hoofs no longer met his ears to guide him in the pursuit, so that he became completely lost and bewildered, at the same time the faithful fellow was almost distracted, for the awful fate which awaited Lord Selborne—if indeed it had not already overtaken him—appeared to be inevitable.

He checked the speed of his horse, and knew not what to do, what course to take.

And the tempest continued unabated in its fury, in fact, it increased in violence every instant, until it had got to a height that was truly terrific.

The rain had almost ceased, and rendered the effects of the lightning still more dangerous. A howling wind now also accompanied the rapid peals of thunder, bellowing among the foliage, and sweeping everything before it in its wrath and rendering still more wretched the situation of any one who unfortunately was exposed to the horrors of that night.

Still more vivid flashes the lightning, splitting the huge trunks of trees that had stood for ages, braving many a fearful storm, and spreading destruction far and near. Still louder roared the thunder, and the angry wind howled still more fiercely round the head of the distracted William, as he pursued his dreary way, half mad at the thought of the awful fate which had but too probably befallen that noble master whom he so highly esteemed, and whom he had so faithfully served.

The scene in which he now found himself, was of the wildest description imaginable, and in perfect keeping with the horrors that prevailed. Here were rocks piled upon rocks, down which the foaming waterfall rushed in awful grandeur; there woody steepes, and frowning darksome glens, that spoke of murder and every other deed of darkness, but not one little spot presented itself for hope to rest upon, all was dreary, black despair.

Some time had now elapsed since the dis-

appearance of his lordship, and all chance of discovering him seemed to be at an end.

Poor William was in an absolute state of agony, and paused, unable to come to any satisfactory conclusion as to what it was best to do. Indeed there was no help, no remedy, and all that he could do was to submit to chance, or to leave the issue of this fearful adventure to the mercy of Providence.

Again the faithful domestic proceeded at a brisk pace, but with a sad and weary heart, for the farther he went more hopeless did his prospects appear to be.

In the meantime what was the fate of the unfortunate Lord Selborne. At the same frightful speed as that we have before described, the terrified animal continued its wild flight, carrying its now almost senseless rider into the midst of every danger, and yet surmounting them all in a most miraculous manner.

At length it reached a craggy steep that rose to a great height in the midst of some of the most frightfully fantastic scenery, that ever the imagination of the painter, in its most wildly extravagant moods conceived.

Up the side of this it attempted to dash, but at the instant it did so, a flash of lightning more terrific, if possible, than any that had preceded it, struck it in its mad career. It gave but one fearful plunge, and horse and rider fell to the earth with fearful violence, both apparently dead.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

"Vell I never, did yer ever? If the blessed helyments is not in a preshus passion to night, I hopes as how I may never skevint. Vot's the use of a cove a puttin' on his best toggs, when the angry storm seem's to wallee 'em as not nuffin'? My crabs or mudcans if yer like to call 'em, are rayther in a shaky condishun, ye've had so much of padden' the hoof lately, an' this here rain is much more free than welcom' with 'em. Now my butter-cup, how does yer feel on this here happy 'cashion? Pretty comfortabel like, eh? Yer won't not vont a shower bath for von while, I reckon, eh?"

This elegant speech I suppose we need scarcely inform the reader proceeded from the lips of our old and facetious friend Mr. Sam Filcher, who with his worthy associate Beaufort were once more exposed to the horrors of the tempest on the night we have been describing in the previous chapter.

As was the usual unfortunate, though not exactly the unmerited fate of those respectable gentlemen, too, they were travelling

through a part of the country which afforded them not the least hope or prospect of a place of shelter, and they were therefore compelled to struggle against their cruel destiny, like all other virtuous people, in the best manner they could.

Filcher, as was his wont, had put a light heart on the matter, indulging in a rich banquet of jokes, such as no other but the "Sprig of Myrtle" could utter, and interspersing the same with an occasional flash ditty followed by an accomplished whistle.

But Beaufort as usual was sour and sullen, hating himself and everything else in creation, and naturally enough, as he considered, blaming the amiable Sam for being the author of all his misery.

And certainly the appearance of these two worthies on that occasion was as wretched and pitiable as could well be imagined. Their hats were soaked into mis-shapen rags that flapped about their heads, the rain oozed from every portion of their clothes, and they might have been said to be treading water, for as Sam had justly observed their boots were in a most ruinous condition from constant travelling.

Still the latter gentleman, as has been before remarked, bore his misfortunes with the patience, resignation, and fortitude of a hero, and scorned—amiable man—to murmur or complain.

"Somehow or t'other," he remarked, "I can't help thinkin' as how there's summat very much to be hadmired in the pluck of sich a preshus storm as this here, for when it vonce only does commence horse-stillies—that's a very hard word, but I spoke it right I know, 'cordin' to Kockiyer—it never cries a go till it's fairly vopt everything afore it. An' there's nuffin' like a goin' the 'hole 'og, bristles an' all, while yer'e about it. Wheugh! there vos a flash, if my gun had only been charged, I might have got a light by it like vinkin'. Now then, captain, vot air yer mutt'r'in' an' grumblin' about? At the veather, I s'pose, vell I'm blowed if there's any pleasin' of yer, not no how, votsomdever. Yer'e a dissatisfied feller, that's vot yer air, an' I'm 'shamed on yer."

"Bah!" returned Beaufort surlily.

"There now, my tulup," returned the patient Mr. Filcher, "don't get out of temper, for I vos never in a better humour in my life. Oh, I s'pose yer waxed because ve didn't stop at that sauggery where ve'd put up, eh?"

"Yes," answered Beaufort, "and I think I've good reason to be so. You're always contriving some infernal mischief or another to annoy me. I think its your delight to make everybody as miserable as you can."

"Hold hard, captain," said Sam, "for ye're sayin' that here wot isn't true, an' I

wallees my k'racter. Vot's th' use of bein' down on yer luck about trifles? Come, I'll giv' yer a bit of a stave, an' that here's sure to raise yer spirits if not nuffin' vill."

Beaufort growled a dissentient and deprecatory oath between his teeth, but Mr. Filcher was not to be thwarted in his good intentions in that manner, and he therefore commenced a fine old "back slum" ditty in stentorian, if not strictly or purely melodious tones, that did much towards sinking the voice of the thunder into insignificance, and he finished his musical display as usual, with a shrill whistle, to which the whistling winds could bear no comparison at all.

Having accomplished this performance much to his own satisfaction, he shook various small cataracts of rain from his clothes, and, as he himself observed, "looked fresh again."

"Cheer up, captain," he said, slapping his hand upon Beaufort's shoulder in a friendly manner; "never say die till yer air dead. For my part I begins to feel kevite comfortable now, tho' I must say as how I could do a drop of heavy vithin, as vell as heavy vithout, an' a bit of veed, if it vos only to put in the tooth wouldn't not be none so dusty, jist now."

"Psha!" growled Beaufort, "will you never cease your foolery? Ah! what's that coming this way?"

"Vy," answered Sam, "it sounds very much like a 'orse, an' a fizzer too, for its a tearin' avay at a rare rate. Hold hard, captain, stand aside, vithout yer vishes to be runn'd over."

Sam laid hold of the arm of his companion and drew him forcibly aside as he spoke, and he had scarcely done so, when the affrighted animal which bore the unfortunate Lord Selborne flew past them with the speed of the lightning, and was out of sight in an instant.

"My eyes," said Sam, "there's a start. I don't not envy that here gemmen his hekevestrun hexercise no how votsundever, for if he don't get his preshus neck broke, vy I'm no feelosifer, that here's all about it. Now then, captain, vot air yer gaping about at? Yer ar'n't afear'd, air yer?"

"Sam," returned Beaufort, "just be serious for once if yer can. Did you not notice the features of the man?"

"No, in course I didn't I must hav' had a preshus good pair of ogles if I had, for he vos past us like a sky rocket."

"I caught sight of them by the lightning."

"Yer did?"

"Yes."

"An' vot of that here?"

"It was Lord Selborne."

"Never! impossible."

"But I'm positive," returned Beaufort; "I'll swear it."

"Vell, I never," observed Sam; "then he'll be a dead man this time, that's sartin."

"We must ascertain his fate, if possible," said Beaufort, "it is not possible that the terrified horse could proceed much farther, at the speed he was going. Follow me, Sam."

"In course I vill," replied the latter gentleman, "Sam Filcher is always the first in the cause of hoomanity. I vonder vwhether his lordship has got any of the rowdy about him."

"Bah!"

"Oh, yer needn't turn yer conk up at the hidear, captain, a few couters would not be to be sneez'd at. But kim along, this is the vay he vent. My eyes! here's another had-wentur. I say captain, d'yer think if as how his lordship dies, he has remembered us in his vill."

"Fool!"

"Fool! not much of that here about ould Sam Filcher, I reckon. I means to say if his lordship has neglected to purwide for us, it's very unkind of him, an' I don't know but as how I shall put his property into chancery."

Beaufort did not condescend any answer to these sage observations, and they pursued their way in the direction which the horse had taken as speedily as possible, Sam calculating in his own mind, upon the probable profitable results of this unexpected adventure.

It was almost a hopeless task, however, and Mr. Sam Filcher was by no means so sanguine upon it as his companion.

"It's all happy go lucky," he remarked, "if we find him all the better, an' if ve don't vy ve shall hav' all our trouble an' anxiety of mind for nuffin'. I still think as how yer must hav' bein mistaken, captain."

"But I tell you again I am positive I was not deceived," replied Beaufort; "swift as the affrighted horse flew past, I caught a distinct view of the features of the rider by the lightning, as I said before, and I am satisfied that they were those of Lord Selborne."

"Infortinat nobleman," said Sam Filcher, symathetically; "I hopes as how that here wishus hanimal didn't go much further, an' thus keep the poor man in suspense."

"It is no subject for jesting," observed Beaufort, "for my own part I almost shudder to think of the fate which but too likely has befallen the unfortunate nobleman."

"Eh, vot?" exclaimed Sam, with a look of surprise, "vy, yer don't mean to go for to say, as how yer've got some feelin' left? Vell, I never! I'm flabbergasted."

"Cease this heartless foolery, Sam," said Beaufort, impatiently, "I am in no humour to listen to it. I will not rest until I have discovered some traces of his lordship."

"Vell, I vishes yer happy, then," returned the incorrigible Sam Filcher, "for it strikes me verry forcibly as how it'll be a preshus long while afore yer does take any rest, that here's all I've got to say about it."

Beaufort saw that it was quite impossible to reply to the observations of his companion, who took a wicked delight in saying anything and everything which was calculated to aggravate, and he therefore refrained from doing so, but greatly excited by the belief he entertained that it was his former associate and dupe, the misguided but unfortunate Lord Selborne whom he had seen in so perilous and awful a situation, he hurried on through the raging tempest, Sam Filcher following, and amusing himself in his usual manner, namely, singing and whistling alternately to his heart's content.

It has been shown that Beaufort of late had felt several qualms of conscience, and would fain have withdrawn himself from that guilty course of life which he had so long pursued, if he had only the opportunity to do so, and his thoughts therefore at the present moment when he supposed his victim had met with an untimely fate, and he recalled to his memory all the wrongs he had done him, the snares he had led him into, and the vices he had been the cause of plunging him into, may be imagined. He shuddered at the thought of his lordship dying without his being nigh to divulge to him a certain secret which he knew would be the means of smoothing his passage to the grave, and of seeking his forgiveness, and therefore his anxiety to know whether the unhappy nobleman had escaped that death which seemed to be inevitable, became the more intense and insupportable.

The keen eye of the hardened Sam Filcher evidently penetrated his thoughts and fixing upon him a look which conveyed a threat as well as contempt and exultation, he said—

"Now, I don't suppose as how yer'd be so soft as to blow the gaff to his lordship, if yer should find that he's not yet stepped it, vithout he comed down summat handsom', would yer? becos, yer see, yer old an' pertickler friend, Mister Sam Filcher, has a verry great hobjeckshun to that here, an' yer know it 'ud be rayther awkward for yer to do anything without his consent."

"Sam," said Beaufort, eyeing him with a mingled look of terror and disgust, "why are you continually throwing out these dark hints and threats to me?"

"Oh, no doubt as how yer verry vell understands me, tho' yer pretends to be so preshus green," replied Sam. "Yer don't forget vot I promised yer if ever I thought as how yer had a hieard of turnin snitch, don't yer? the blunt an' the free pardon offered might just as well be mine as yourn,

an' depend upon it the Sprig of Myrtle is just the verry little boy as 'ud do the b'sness for yer if yer doesn't vatch it. Jist remember that here, that's all."

Beaufort shuddered as the former threat of his guilty associate rushed upon his recollection, for he saw how completely he was in his power, and that he would be compelled to plunge deeper and deeper still into crime, just as it suited his guilty and malicious will, and that it would be impossible for him to escape the awful and ignominious fate which sooner or later awaited such a career of infamy.

"Hardened villain," was upon his lips, but he feared to utter it, and compelled to play the hypocrite in order to quiet the suspicions of Sam, and likewise to appease his wrath, he said—

"Filcher you suspect me wrongfully: I would indeed have you abandon that thirst for blood which has hitherto characterised you, and involved us both in such fearful dangers, but though we might agree to separate, I am ready to swear that no word of mine should ever be the means of betraying you."

"You swear, ha, ha, ha!" laughed the desperate scoundrel, contemptuously, "as though yer blessed oath vos vorth a straw, an' as if I didn't hold the halter over yer head as 'ud scrag yer, an' set me at liberty if yer vos to offend me. Come, I likes that here, I does, it's a rich joke; ha, ha, ha!" As for sep'ratin'—Walker! I knows my vay about too vell for that here. No, no, my fine feller, Sam Filcher vill stick to yer like a leech, never fear, and yer'd better mind vot yer about, if yer vishes to hobtain the hextingished onner of his fayver an' friendship. So kim along, I don't s'pose as how ve shall see nuffin of his lordship, but ve might drop upon some place of shelter from this here blessed storm, which 'ud be some comfort anyhow, for tho' I've rayther enjoyed it all along, I now begins to get the sick of it. Too much of a good thing's good for nuffin."

Beaufort made no reply, for he knew it was only a waste of time and words to do so, and they continued on their way, looking earnestly and eagerly as far as their eyes could penetrate, whenever the vivid flashes of the lightning permitted them to do so, but without discovering anything which was at all likely to guide them in their search, and the distance they had come seemed to make it very unlikely that they would do so.

Beaufort became vexed and disappointed, but Mr. Sam Filcher treated the matter with his usual indifference, and again endeavoured to raise the drooping spirits of himself and his companion, under the miserable circumstances in which they were placed, by



chaunting a song in his peculiar and most vociferous style.

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE HORSE AND ITS RIDER.

For some considerable distance further Sam Filcher and his companion Beaufort proceeded without any more promising results, and the patience of the latter worthy was becoming every moment more exhausted, while the Sprig of Myrtle having worked himself into the happiest vein under difficulties, took everything very coolly, especially the wind and the rain which continued in the most tempestuous mood, and did not seem at all likely to abate their violence.

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The roaring thunder was also as strong in voice as ever, and the lightning continued to flash its most vivid fires; in fact, it was quite evident that the war of elements would not cease that night or for some hours, at least, and not the least signs of a place of shelter could be met with.

"Vell, captain, my flower," said Mr. Sam Filcher, having finished his song, "how does yer seem to enjoy yer preshus self now. Nice and cumfurlabel like, eh? If yer'e not, yer may as vell make up yer mind to be so, for bless'd of any shelter shall ve get to-night, I'll take my davy of that, an' as ve've both on us been vet through an' through for these two 'ours vot's the konsekens? Vot a blessed thing it is for a man to be of a 'appy an' continted dispersishun. Vot about his lordship now? If that here vild hanimal

hasn't bust his biler, vy he must have galloped to t'other end of the world afore now."

"The fate of Lord Selborne is certain," returned Beaufort, with a shudder, and a look of regret, "the affrighted animal, at the fearful speed it was going when it passed us, must have carried him to destruction."

"A very nat'ral bidear," observed Sam, an' as ve couldn't come in at the death, I only hope ve may diskiver summat of him afore anybody else does, for ve might find some loose cash about him which would be rayther handy, 'specially as ve arn't not very vell up in the stirrups jist now. Vot d'yer say, captain?"

Beaufort did not say anything, for his thoughts at that moment were not at all in unison with those of his reckless and desperate companion, and he therefore considered that it would be much wiser on his part to remain silent than to venture to differ from him in opinion.

"Vell," said Filcher, "yer don't answer me, so silence guvs consent, I s'pose. I'm afeard, howsomd'ever, as there's no sich luck for us to-night as to tumble across the rowdy. This here's not von of the pleasantest spots as I've seen, but it 'ud be greatly improoved if some traveller would only be so good as to ouner it vith his presen'ce, vith plenty of the stuff about him. That here would be the ticket, eh? B'sness, captain, b'sness."

The place which they were now traversing was certainly, as Sam Filcher had described it, not one of the most agreeable in the world, nothing could be more wild and cheerless, even under the most favourable aspect of the weather, but on such a night as that in such a terrific storm, it was rendered doubly frightful.

Sam Filcher, however, took very little heed of it or the tempest either, but rather seemed to enjoy them than otherwise, probably the more so because they annoyed and even terrified his now cowardly associate in crime.

"I'm almost knocked up," however he acknowledged at last, "for ve've valked many preshus long miles, vith not nuffin to eat or drink, an' not so much as a mouthful of baccy, an' I'm not keвите so young as I used to vos. I can't go much further, an' that's all about it, for bless'd if I couldn't go to sleep in a river, an no gammon. Vot say yer, captain, s'pose ve takes up our lodgin' under this here tree, an' bid the vorld good night, eh?"

"Are you mad?" demanded Beaufort, "do you think we could sleep in such a place, and in such a storm as this?"

"In course ve could," returned Filcher, "since ve can't not find no better, at any rate I could, but yer'e so pertickler; beggars mustn't be choosers, yer know. Wheugh,

there vos another flash of lightenin', it'll never leave off blazin', an no mistake."

"It was a friendly flash," observed Beaufort.

"Vos it?" said Sam, "how d'yer make that here out?"

"It revealed something to me that shows we are on the right track."

"Vot for? some place of shelter?"

"No."

"Vot then?"

"To discover something of his lordship."

"Vot noshun have yer got into that here preshus nob of yourn now? demanded Sam, impatiently.

"I saw the imprint of horse's hoofs in the earth," answered Beaufort, "and that satisfies me that it was in this direction that the affrighted animal winged its mad flight."

"I rayther doubt it."

"You have no reason to doubt it. Keep your eyes upon the ground, and the next flash of lightning will probably convince you. There."

A broad glare of lightning at that moment illumined all around, and Sam having followed the instructions which Beaufort had given him, noticed the impression of horse's hoofs in the clayey ground as the latter had described them.

"All right," said Sam, "this is the vay that here blessed hanimal vent, an' not no mistake. Nuffin but a horse in sich a fit could have tear'd up the ground in this here manner. Kim along, captain, I think I smells horseflesh already. Oh, this here adventure will produce us some of the rowdy, never fear."

Beaufort looked at the hardened villain with an expression of extreme disgust, but said nothing, and they hurried on, following the hoof-marks as they were revealed to them by the flashes of lightning that so rapidly succeeded each other.

At length they came in sight of the fatal steep where the frightful calamity to the unfortunate Lord Selborne had taken place, and at the foot of which lay the horse and its rider.

"That here's rayther a orkard looking place, captain," observed Filcher, pointing to the rocky steep, "an' if that here vild 'orse should have taken it into his head to gallop up it, in the vay he vos doing when ve seed him, vhy he must break his preshus neck an' his lordship's too, that here's all about it."

Beaufort shuddered, for the fate of the unfortunate nobleman was now as apparent to him as if he had witnessed it.

There was another glare of lightning, and then Sam Filcher suddenly grasping his companions arm, said—

"Hold 'ard, guvner."

"What now?" demanded Beaufort, hastily.

"Didn't yer see nuffin'?"

"No; did you?"

"Yes; or else my preshus ogles deceived me, I seed summat as looked wery much like a 'orse at the foot of that here steep."

"Ah," exclaimed Beaufort, eagerly, "then let us on."

"Stop till it lightens again," said Sam.

They had not to wait long.

"There," said Filcher, pointing in the direction of the steep, "did yer twig it then, guvner?"

Beaufort did indeed "twig it," and that which he indistinctly saw he believed to be the carcass of a horse lying at the foot of the steep.

"You were right, Sam," he observed.

"In course I vos," answered that amiable gentleman, "it's a 'orse arn't it?"

"No doubt the carcass of one."

"Then his lordship isn't far hoff, I'll warrant. Poor young nobleman. I hope his pockets is well furnished though."

"Sam, Sam," said Beaufort, in a tone of remembrance.

"Vell, vot 'arm did I say?" demanded Filcher, "I dare say his lordship don't vant the tin now, an' never vill ag'in; ve does, that here's all the difference. B'sness, captain; kim along."

Beaufort needed no urging to do so, for his anxiety and impatience had reached the highest pitch.

Another few minutes brought them to the foot of the fatal steep, and there their surmises were confirmed.

Yes, there indeed lay the horse and its rider, the former quite dead, and the latter apparently lifeless.

Beaufort trembled as a feeling of remorse and horror came over him, and he paused. But Mr. Sam Filcher who, happily for himself, did not experience any of those troublesome feelings, advanced to the foot of the steep, in order the more fully to satisfy himself that they were not mistaken.

He quickly returned to the spot on which Beaufort was standing deeply wrapped in painful thought.

"All right, captain," he remarked in a voice of satisfaction; "they're both there, an' it's his lordship, sure enuff."

"Unfortunate man," ejaculated the wretched guilty Beaufort, evincing real grief; "poor Selborne."

"There," said Sam Filcher, impatiently, "let's have none of that here. Kim along, we've not no time to spare."

Beaufort looked at him for a moment with a mingled expression of disgust and dread, and then with trembling footsteps he followed Sam Filcher to the foot of the fatal steep.

And there in the lurid glare of the lightning, with ghastly and blood-stained upturned face, lay the unfortunate nobleman, perfectly inanimate, and apparently dead—in fact, it seemed impossible that he should be otherwise from the time which had elapsed since the frightful catastrophe had taken place—and near him was the noble animal he had rode for years, and which had at last come to so frightful a death.

It was a most awful sight, and Beaufort gazed appalled, stung with remorse, and trembling in every limb.

But Mr. Sam Filcher, who held the more refined feelings in most superlative contempt had his eye to business.

"Vell," he remarked, stooping down, and examining his lordship, "its all u p with him, an' not no mistake. My eyes, captain, only look, see vot a beautiful goold chain an' bunch of hinguns, he vears, dear nobleman, this here's von slice of luck, an' not no mistake."

"Sam," said Beaufort, with a look of horror, "you surely cannot be heartless wretch enough to touch anything on his lordship's person."

"Gammon an' all," returned Filcher, "you're a fool! stan' out of the way, vith yer, while I makes a surway. Vot's the use of nuffin' to him now?"

Beaufort's terror and disgust increased but Sam Filcher, humming a tune to himself whilst so occupied, proceeded to rifle the pockets of Lord Selborne, first drawing a very valuable gold watch, with corresponding appendages from his fob, which he examined with looks of the most unqualified satisfaction and admiration.

"Here's a splendashus ticker," he said, "fit for a hemp'rer, an' no gammon, this here's up to a hunderd at least. All right for a beginnin'. Now let's see what further luck."

He put his hand in the side pocket of his lordship's coat, and drawing forth a pocket-book, eagerly examined the contents.

"Another slice of luck," he said, in high glee, "full of bank notes. Our fortin's made to a dead certainty, captain, if I continny to go on at this here rate. That here's lot two. Now for the t'other pockets. Nuffin' in that but a silver pencil-case, and that here's not much account. Hollo! this here vill do though," he added exultingly, and holding up a weighty purse to the gaze of the horror-struck and trembling Beaufort. "I vonder his lordship should carry so much wallable property vith him, ven there's so many dishonest people about. Vell, I can't say as how I'm pertikly sorry for it."

"Hold, Sam, if you value your life," said Beaufort with a look of the greatest alarm, and grasping his arm.

"Vot the devil's the matter now?" demanded Sam, starting to his feet.

"Some persons are coming this way."

"Stuff! yer'e dreamin'."

"Be not obstinate. Hark, between the pauses of the thunder you may hear the sound of their feet."

Sam did listen, and a terrible oath escaped his lips.

"Damn it," he said, "yer'e right for vonce, captain, there's some von comin'. I've got the svag, howsomdever, 'cept these two or three fawnies hoff his lordship's fingers, so it don't much matter."

He hastily tore the rings from the fingers of the insensible nobleman, and whilst he was doing so, the sound of footsteps became more distinct, presently afterwards lights were seen to be moving about at a short distance, and then several persons approached towards the fatal spot.

"Ved better make ourselves scarce, captain," remarked Sam Filcher, "I've got the svag all right; they can have his lordship now, an' sell his horse to the knacker, so hoff she did vent."

Beaufort cast one look of agony on the ghastly features of the ill-fated Lord Selborne, his former companion and friend, and then, almost unconscious of what was passing, he suffered Filcher to hurry him from the fatal spot.

CHAPTER C.

THE DISCOVERY.—THE FAITHFUL SERVANT.

It was the faithful domestic of Lord Selborne, accompanied by several peasants bearing torches, and carrying a litter, who were approaching the scene of the catastrophe.

William, whom we left in a state of the greatest anxiety and perplexity, continued to ride for some time at the top of his horse's speed, in various directions, in the fruitless search after his unfortunate master, and every moment his fears as to the fate which had befallen him gained strength, and the anguish of the poor, faithful fellow was most acute.

At length, after riding through the storm in this manner for about a couple of hours, he suddenly and unexpectedly arrived at a small, secluded village, the inhabitants of which had not yet retired to rest.

There was an old fashioned tavern at the entrance of the village, and at the door of which, William, quite exhausted with the extraordinary exertions he had undergone, and anxiety of mind, alighted, and giving his horse to the care of an ostler, he walked into the house and called for some refreshment, for he was almost fainting, and having

partaken of which and somewhat recovered himself, he explained to the worthy host, who had expressed some curiosity at the excitement he evinced, the cause of his agitation.

"God bless me!" said the landlord, "how extraordinary. One of my neighbours, Master Job Jobson, was here not more than half an hour ago, and he was telling me and some of my guests, that on his way home, he was alarmed by a horse, with a gentleman on his back, dashing past him at a frightful speed, and being out of sight in an instant, in the direction of the Devil's Steep, the scene of many a fearful accident."

"Alas! alas!" ejaculated William, with much emotion, "it must have been my poor master, and I shudder to think of the dreadful fate he has too surely met with. What shall I do? I shall go mad; but it was no fault of mine, it was the lightning which frightened the poor animal, and he started off before I had the least power to prevent him. Can you render me any assistance, my good sir, on this melancholy occasion?"

"Why, yes, my friend," replied the landlord, "I may render you assistance, so far as this goes, I can get Job Jobson, and two or three of my other neighbours to conduct you to the Devil's Steep, in which direction, as I said before, the affrighted horse was bearing your unfortunate master, and where you may probably be able to ascertain the fate which has befallen him. I only hope that it may turn out to be not so bad as you fear."

"Oh, thanks, thanks, kind sir," said William, "and well shall those be rewarded who will render me such an essential service. I pray you, sir, do not delay."

"I will see Job Jobson immediately," said the worthy host, "and I know that he and his friends, without wishing for any reward, will be ready to render every assistance in their power. The Devil's Steep is not more than half an hour's walk from here."

Thus saying, and without giving William time to make use of my farther observation, the landlord hurried from the room on his humane and praiseworthy errand.

In a short time he returned, accompanied by Job Jobson, and several other peasants, who had provided themselves with lighted torches, and fortunately the landlord had a litter in his house, which it was considered advisable to take with them, and thus prepared, they immediately departed on their melancholy errand.

It has been seen that they arrived at the fatal spot, just at that moment when Beaufort and the desperate ruffian, Sam Filcher quitted it, and the emotion of the faithful William, on beholding the awful spectacle which presented itself, and the realisation of

his worst fears, may be better imagined than described.

He knelt down by the side of his unfortunate master, and gazed at his ghastly and distorted features with feelings of agony which we will not attempt to describe.

"Oh, my noble, my honoured master," he exclaimed, "that thus in the very prime of your life you should meet with so shocking a fate as this, and I not able to avert it. Alas! what can I do? What will become of me? I shall go mad!"

"The poor gentleman," said honest Job Jobson—who bore the character among those of his class, of being one of the best fellows in existence—has been robbed by some scoundrel or other, since the accident, for see his pockets are turned inside out."

"What brutal wretch or wretches can have done this?" said William, "but that alas, is trifling to the loss of his valued life."

"He's not dead!" suddenly observed one of the peasants, who had been minutely examining the supposed corpse. "I felt his heart beat just now."

"Not dead!" repeated William, with a look of astonishment and incredulity, "oh, God grant that it may indeed be so, but I dare not encourage the hope after the injuries he has received, and time which has elapsed since the accident took place."

Eagerly he pressed his hand over the heart of the inanimate and apparently lifeless nobleman, and an exclamation of joy and gratitude escaped him, for as the peasant had stated, he felt it beat, although so faint that it was scarcely perceptible.

"'Tis true," he cried, "'tis true, life is indeed not yet extinct, and, with the assistance of Providence, it may not yet be too late to save him. I beseech you, my kind friend, let there be no delay in removing him to the inn, where probably the assistance of a surgeon may be obtained."

"Fortunately," replied Job Jobson, "there is one at present staying at the inn in attendance upon the landlady. Poor nobleman, I'm sure, I do sincerely hope that it may not be too late to restore him, although I'm afraid he is too far gone for that. Now neighbours, lift him carefully on to the litter, and then we must make our way back to the inn with as little delay as possible."

This was promptly done, and immediately they were making their way on their return to the inn with all the speed they could, and the heart of poor William palpitating with mingled hope and fear.

In the meantime Beaufort and Sam Filcher continued to hurry on their way—the former suffering the most severe anguish and remorse, likewise in dread of pursuit, but the latter conducting himself with his usual self-possession, and cool indifference—until they

had got a considerable distance from the scene of the catastrophe, when they ventured to stop to take breath, and to consider what it would be best to do.

The storm, contrary to their expectations, had greatly abated, and seemed likely shortly to cease altogether, and the place in which they now found themselves was far less cheerless than the wild and dreary scenery they had hitherto travelled among.

"Vell, I say captain," observed Sam, "this here hasn't turned out such a bad job, arter all. To be sure his lordship has turned up his toes much ag'in his hindlinashun, I dare say, but it's an ill vint as doesn't not blow nobody any good, an' he carried a pretty good svag about him—which I have taken care of—to console us for his loss, poor feller."

"Sam," said Beaufort, unable any longer to restrain his feelings of indignation and disgust, "you are a hardened, brutal, scoundrel."

"Vell," returned Filcher, "I knows it, I could have told yer that. But I say, old feller, I would jist advise yer to be a little more choice in yer langedge, when yer addresses yerself to Sam Filcher, the Sprig of Myrtle, cos yer see as how yer can't afford to offend a gemman of his extinction. But come, vot's the use of being down in the mouth? This is a fine haul ve've got to-night, an' ve're up in the stirrups ag'in, so Sam Filcher for von don't care a straw for any von."

Beaufort fixed upon the heartless miscreant a look of loathing, of which, however, he took no notice, being too busily occupied in congratulating himself on the favourable result of the night's adventure to do so, and they both remained silent for a few minutes.

"There's one blessed consolation, howsomdever," remarked Mr. Sam Filcher, at length breaking the silence, "and that here is that the storm has left off its capers, an' that ve can travel along an' enjoy ourselves on the road. Cheer up, my buttercup, it strikes me rayther forcibly as how ve shall soon come across some crib or t'other, an' von't I soon have a glorious lush on the strength of this here night's luck, an' no mistake."

"Sam," said Beaufort, "how can you thus appear to exult in the death of the unfortunate Lord Selborne, to whom our conduct has been most atrocious?"

"Why," answered the villain, "in the first place, cos he'd have scragged us both, if he'd have had a chance, an' in the next, cos ve happened to tumble across his body, an' to secure the svag afore any one else could. Wery good reasons, I think, howsomdever I'm satisfied. Now then, vot air yer gaping about at?"

"Did you not hear anything?"

"Not I, only the vind, which still blows a good un. Vot did yer think as yer heard?"

"I could almost swear that I heard voices muttering our names," answered Beaufort, looking around him with an expression of the utmost terror.

"Bah," returned Filcher, contemptuously and impatiently, "it's only you as is so preshus narvus. Guilty consense; I'm never troubled with that here; I'm always happy in my mind—that's all through leading a good an' wirtuous life."

"Wretch," had almost escaped the lips of Beaufort, as his guilty associate uttered these words with a satirical grin, but he checked himself.

He was in a state of the most nervous excitement, caused, no doubt, as Sam had observed by the upbraidings of a guilty conscience, and he imagined all kinds of alarming things. He could fancy he heard the mutterings of men near him, then his own name and that of Sam Filcher pronounced with execrations, and the ghastly, distorted features of the ill-fated Lord Selborne were next by his disordered imagination presented to his view, the same as he had so recently beheld them.

So strong were these impressions upon his guilty mind that he could not resist them, and a convulsive tremor came over him which shook him like the palsy.

This did not escape the keen and penetrating eye of the sagacious Sam Filcher, and with a look of the most supreme contempt, he demanded—

"Now then, vot the devil do yer stand there for shakin' an' tremblin', rank cur as yer air? D'yer s'pose that his lordship is vaked up an' come to ax me to return his property, eh? Cos if he did he wouldn't have it, yer may take yer blessed davy on that here."

"Let us leave this spot," said Beaufort, in a faltering voice, and again looking timidly around him, as though he expected his eyes to encounter some ghastly object. "Let us quit this spot, Filcher, and I implore you never again to make the fearful allusions you have just now uttered."

"Mongrel, coward," said Filcher, with still greater contempt than before, and at the same time grasping him rudely by the arm, "I'm ashamed on yer, that's vot I am. Vill yer never learn to be a man?"

"A man," repeated Beaufort, in a tone of bitter self-reproach, "oh, no, no; I have long since forfeited all claim to that title."

"No more of that here nonsense," said Sam, "but kim along, vill yer?"

Beaufort said no more, and glad to escape from the spot he willingly followed his guilty and hardened companion.

After walking for about another half hour they entered upon the high road, but saw no one to alarm them, and they at length had the good fortune to arrive at a small and comfortable-looking inn, which, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour was still open.

"Here ve air at last," said Filcher, with a look of satisfaction, "arter all the heart-rending troubles an' misfortins it has been our very hard lot to hindoor, ve may here rest our blessed selves in peace vith all mankind. Better late than not never, as Shikspur says in his trag-e-dy of the Devil and Doctor Fustus. Now, captain, jist keep yer pecker up an' look fresh an' vell, an' mind what yer ses, an' vot yer does, or yer'll have old Sam Filcher about yer ouse. Yer understands me, doesn't yer?"

Beaufort did indeed understand the villain, and shuddered, but he returned no answer, and mustering up all the composure he could he followed Sam Filcher into the inn.

CHAPTER CI.

A DISAGREEABLE RENCONTRE.

Nothing particular had occurred to Phoebe Mayfield and her friends since we last left them; but the painful scene with the unfortunate old Mark in the summer-house, continued to agitate their minds, particularly as all prospects of his being restored to reason was as far off as ever, although the violence of the malady had again abated.

And, in spite of all the efforts of Henry and his sister, our heroine could not banish from her recollection the last meeting with the mysterious old gipsy sybil, and the singular and threatening observations she had given utterance to, and in reflecting upon them it cost her many a painful hour.

Two or three days after the events that have been recorded in the two or three preceding chapters, Henry Ashford being called away from the farm on business, Phoebe, accompanied by Amy, as was her daily custom, walked to the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Stubbles, to inquire after the health of her afflicted parent, and it was not till the evening that they left to return home.

"Vell, here ve is ag'in," said Mr. Sam Filcher, on the evening in question, as they entered the village of Dewsbury, "an a looking as fresh an' vell as a couple of daisies. It's a preshus long time since this here blessed willage vos onnered vith our presence afore, an' two sich rank svels, an' no gammon, as ve air, too. I shouldn't vonder if yer'e old flame, Amy Ashford, who usedn't to give yer much hincouragement vos to see

you now, if she wasn't to be keville captiwayted vith yer."

There certainly was a remarkable change in the personal appearance of both Beaufort and Sam Filcher since the memorable night of the tempest, and few persons would have been able, in their now smart and fashionable clothes, to recognise them as the same individuals.

Beaufort in particular had undergone a most extraordinary metamorphosis, and seemed to have regained all his former spirits, and to have banished all those gloomy thoughts and fears that had before tortured him. He could even afford to laugh at the coarse and brutal jokes which Sam Filcher so delighted to indulge in, and seemed, in fact, to be perfectly at his ease in every respect.

"I say, captain," observed Sam Filcher, "s'pose, as ve're not likely to be known in this here toggery, should ve meet vith any of our old acquaintances, ve jist takes a bit of a stroll through the willage, an' then pays a visit to the cottage where Phoebe Mayfield used to hang out when she vos a hinnocent young wirgin, eh?"

"I'm quite agreeable, Sam," answered Beaufort, "indeed I am anxious to visit all the old spots while we are in this neighbourhood, and before we depart on the continent. Only we must be careful to avoid that confounded beadle, who had my coat pocket and the secret in it, for he's got an eye like a hawk, and would be sure to recognise us."

"All right, guvner," said Sam, "now I vonder vwhether that blessed creetur, vot has caused sich a devil of a bother—Phoebe Mayfield, I mean—is still alive an' kickin', an' her old father as vos flat enuff to go mad acos she runned away an' left him, and that here young feller as vos Phoebe's loviyer, an' not forgettin' yer old pertikler, his sister, captain. But kim along, and p'raps ve shall be able to larn."

Having thus made their arrangements, the two villains confident in their disguise, walked leisurely through the village arm in arm, and then made their way to the once happy home of Phoebe Mayfield.

The evening was very fine, the sun having just sunk behind the western hills, when Beaufort and his companion stood before the cottage, and gazed with some surprise to find it restored to all its former simple beauty, and bearing all the pleasant aspect that it did on that fatal evening when Phoebe eloped from her home.

"Ah!" said Beaufort, with a melancholy feeling which he could not resist, "what strange events have happened since then, what extraordinary changes have taken place. I was then the gay, the fashionable, the reckless Captain Beaufort, the friend and

associate of Lord Selborne. What am I now?"

"Vhy, a thief, an' the pal of ould Sam Filcher, the Sprig of Myrtle, him as fit Hookem Snivey, that here's the only diff'rence," said Sam, "an' I means to say as how yer ought to feel proud of his friendship. He'll stick to yer like bricks, never fear. I vonder who's hinside the cottage. I'll see."

"Be cautious, Sam," said Beaufort.

"There, don't be alarmed," returned Sam, walking to the window and peeping in. "Oh," he added, "there's only a old 'oman. So kim along, captain, an' ve'll jist take a turn to the cottage of yer young 'oman, an' see if she is still alive; what say yer?"

Of course Beaufort—who had, assisted no doubt, by the sage counsels and moral advice of Mr. Sam Filcher, for the time being, at any rate, relieved himself of all those disagreeable qualms of conscience that of late had so much annoyed him, and again become the reckless scoundrel, as of yore—could raise no reasonable objection to a proposition so completely in unison with his own taste and wishes, so again taking each other's arm, they paraded themselves from the spot, with all the pompous airs and graces of "the rankest swells"—as the worthy Filcher would have said—towards the former residence of Henry and his sister.

"I say, captain," observed Sam, as they proceeded on their way, "this here's a leetel himprovemint I think, on that here blessed night of the storm, when ve two infortunat gemmen vos hexposid to the fury hof the hangry heliments, eh?"

"Right, Sam," coincided Beaufort, "and I must say that we bore our misfortunes with the most Christian fortitude."

"I did," said Filcher, "as I allus does. But you vos most preshusly down, as yer allus lately use to vos. Howsomdever, I thinks as how yer've got over that here now, so I'll not say no nuffin' more about it."

"It was a fearful night."

"No it va'n't."

"It wasn't?"

"No; it vos a lovely night,"

"How so?"

"Vhy, didn't it bring us the sugar," said Sam, triumphantly, "put all these here fine toggs upon our backs, an' leave us vith plenty of the rowdy in the hixchicker, to take our pleshur on the continint, as gemmen ought to do."

"True," answered Beaufort, somewhat wincing, however, at the recollections which the observations of Filcher awakened.

"An' von't ve do the thing in style," continued the amiable Mr. Sam Filcher, "when ve gets over to France? an' shan't ve be hadmired by everybody? Now I shouldn't at

all vonder if they vos to have our poortraits in the picter shops."

"I hope not."

"Yer hopes not?"

"Yes."

"Vhy?"

"Because it would be not only awkward, but also extremely dangerous," replied Beaufort.

"How d'yer make that here out captain?" interrogated Sam.

"Why," returned Beaufort, "if the said portraits should happen to reach England the agreeable features of yourself and me might chance to be recognised by some of the traps, ss you call the officers, and they might probably take it in their heads to pay their respects to us, before we wanted such a mark of esteem."

"Ah, I see, be down upon us, grab us, that here would be rayther hinconvenient," said Sam, "so I think ve'll decline the poortraits."

"It would be advisable to do so."

"Wery prudent, but here ve air. It's a wery pretty crib, isn't it, and looks jist the same as ever"

They stood before the pretty but humble cottage which had formerly been the residence of Henry Ashford and his sister, and which, as Sam Filcher had truly observed, looked the same as ever.

"I wonder if Amy Ashford and her brother still reside here," said Beaufort.

"Yer'd like to see *her*, then?" observed Sam.

"Well, I confess I should," answered Beaufort, "for you know I always had a sneaking regard for Amy."

"All right, I'll hinkivier."

"Stop, should you be known?"

"Vot of that? There's not no von here ve need be afeard on; asides arnt ve got our barkers vith us, if they should be vanted to be made use of?"

"True, do as you please then."

"Stand aside."

Beaufort did so, and the impudent and daring Sam Filcher, assuming a very dignified air, walked up to the cottage door and knocked at it boldly.

It was immediately answered by the worthy dame who now inhabited it, and who stared with no little amazement and some confusion at receiving so unexpected and gentlemanly a visit, and, after dropping several curtsies, requested to know what the "squire's" business might be.

"Squire!" the Sprig of Myrtle felt the compliment proudly, but smiled graciously as he replied politely:

"I ax pardin, my old duchiss, but—ah—hem—I vishes to see that here young chap. Hem—hem—Henry Ashford, I thinks as how they calls him."

"Measter Ashford an' his sister, Miss Amy—God bless her—" replied the worthy old dame, "don't live here now, zur; they be down at farm, w' poor Miss Phoebe Mayfield—bless her heart—at the White Farm, by Squire Stubbles, at yonder, zur."

"Thank yer, my old buttercup," said Sam, "here's a bob for yer, and may yer live for never."

The poor old woman took the shilling from the generous hand of the benevolent Sam Filcher, gratefully, and after dropping numerous more curtsies, re-entered her dwelling and closed the door.

"There, captain," said Sam, walking over to his companion, "havn't I done that here in a style as no other gemman but Sam Filcher could have done?"

He then explained to Beaufort what had taken place between himself and the old woman, much to his surprise and satisfaction.

"Phoebe Mayfield still living," he partly muttered to himself, as a certain nefarious idea suddenly suggested itself to his guilty mind, "Lord Selborne no more, ah! there's an opportunity yet."

"Where's a hoppersportunity, an' vot for?" demanded Sam, whose quick ear had caught what he said.

"Nothing, nothing, Sam," replied Beaufort, confused, and trying to evade the question; "I was only thinking."

"Vell," interrupted Filcher, "I knows yer vos thinkin', but vot about? Come, out vith it."

"It was a foolish idea," replied Beaufort, "and I wonder that it should ever occur to me. We'll say no more about it."

"Oh, wery vell, jist as yer please," returned Sam, "only mind there mustn't not be no secrets 'tween us, that here's all, an' if I find yer try to deceive or gammon me, I'll, no matter, I dare say yer knows vot I mean."

"Yes, yes," answered Beaufort hastily;

"I'll not attempt to deceive you Sam."

"Yer'd better not."

"I think we had better not venture to the farm."

"Why not?"

"It might be attended with danger."

"Stuff! yer's boginnin' to get fearin' ag'in, air yer?" said Sam.

"No, no," returned Beaufort, who was fearful of offending him, "you are mistaken, Sam, I do not fear anything; I only thought it would be most prudent. But you know best."

"In course I does," said Sam; "so kim along, an' ve'll take a surway of Henry Ashford's new crib. I say, captain, things is a lookin' up vith him it seems."

"True."

"Rayther better than when ve pack'd him



off to sea, for the benefit of his health, eh, guvner?"

"Yes, yes," replied Beaufort, impatiently.

"Ve may turn him to some account yet," observed Filcher, with a sinister look.

"What do you mean?" hastily interrogated Beaufort.

"I'll tell yer more about it arter ve've hinspected the farm," replied Sam.

"Ah," exclaimed Beaufort, with a look of fear and disapprobation, "I begin to understand you now."

"Do yer; that's lucky, an' only jist mind that yer hact as I advise, or—"

"Hold, Sam," said Beaufort, who felt anything but easy after the hints which Sam had thrown out, "there is no occasion to threaten. We can talk over this business on some future occasion."

No. 45.

"Wery good," agreed Sam; "then kim along, an' here ve air, I reckon, an' a wery han'some farm it is too, an' Sam Filcher wouldn't not care if he vos only the proper-ieter of it."

They had come suddenly upon the farm, in emerging from a long shady lane, and certainly its appearance, and the beauty of the rural scenery by which it was surrounded, as seen in the bright moonlight, was sufficient to excite the admiration of all who beheld it.

Beaufort looked at it earnestly, and he could not but envy the apparent happiness and prosperity of Henry Ashford as he did so.

"I vonder how Henry Ashford raised the tin to get into sich a 'stabishmint as this here," said Sam; "s'pose ve take a walk round it, captain?"

Beaufort raised no objection, and they moved from the spot on which they had been standing accordingly.

They had arrived at a pathway which led to one of the entrances of the farm-yard, when Sam Filcher suddenly nudged the arm of his companion, gave a short whistle, and said—

"Lucky, by Jew-peter, captain."

"What's lucky?" demanded Beaufort.

"Why look, if yer not blind, an' yer'll say so."

Beaufort did look in the direction in which Sam pointed, and by the light of the moon which streamed full upon the spot, he beheld two female forms approaching leisurely along the pathway towards the farm.

"Vot d'yer think on them here, captain," said the amorous Sam; "doesn't yer think them here a couple of beauties an' not no mistake. An' I say, my flower, doesn't it strike yer as how yer've seen 'em somewhere before?"

"Yes," replied Beaufort, eagerly, "as I live it is Phoebe Mayfield and Amy Ashford."

"The very hidetikel dewinities," said Sam, "an' any von would think that they'd made a pintment to meet us. They've no von with them, too, an' that here makes it all the better. Let's stand aside behind this tree, an' vatch them till they comes nearer."

Sam Filcher drew his companion behind a tree which grew near the spot as he thus spoke, and they watched our heroine and her companion—who had been too deeply engaged in conversation to observe them—narrowly as they came slowly along the pathway, till they had arrived near the farm, when Sam Filcher without waiting to consult Beaufort took his arm and stepped with him into the pathway immediately before Phoebe and Amy, who started back a few paces in astonishment and alarm on beholding them, though they did not recognise them, and it was not likely that they should do so from the time which had elapsed since they had last seen them, and the metamorphoses that their personal appearance had undergone.

They attempted, however, to avoid them, by stepping out of the pathway, but Filcher and Beaufort—who had now become more bold and determined, seeing that there was no one near to observe them or to interrupt them—were not to be thwarted or disappointed in their wishes in that way, and they immediately stepped out of the pathway also, and again placed themselves before them, and Mr. Sam Filcher with much gallantry raised his hat with one hand, and made a graceful bow which would not have disgraced a courtier.

Phoebe and her companion were now indeed seriously alarmed, especially as they had no one with them to protect them from

insult, and they feared that Henry had not yet returned home.

Still they neither of them had the least recollection of the villains; but Sam Filcher did not keep them long in suspense.

"Yer very most hobeant, ladies," he said, with remarkable gallantry, and which no doubt he thought was admirably calculated to make a favourable impression, "it does me proud, an' I'm sartin sure as how it's preshus good for keever hogles to see yer. Wery anxhous to ax arter the state of yer mortal remains."

The surprise and terror of our heroine at the vulgar boldness of this speech increased, and they clung to each other; but still such was the alteration that time and circumstances had wrought in the features and personal appearance of both the villains as we have said before, that they did not yet recognise them, though there was something fearfully familiar in the coarse and impudent tones of Sam Filcher's voice which struck them forcibly.

They again endeavoured to step out of the way, but Filcher took good care to prevent them from doing so, bowing and scraping before them at every turn, with an insolent leer which he meant to be particularly fascinating, and Beaufort, whose worst passions were inflamed at the sight of the beauteous friends, aiding and abetting him by every means in his power.

"Not a verd, my lovely dewinities, to two of the spiciest gemmen vot is," said the captivating Sam, in a tone of gentle reproach, "vell, I never, that here bangs cock-fightin' that here does, an' I feels keville hurt. Allow me to hinderaduce my most rewered, respected, and gallant friend, who feels hisself keville chuff at seein' of yer, don't yer my flower?"

"Oh, indeed I am quite enraptured," replied Beaufort with a most graceful bow, and a bland smile, "and I hope, my dear ladies, that you reciprocate the feeling."

"This is most insolent and insufferable," said our heroine with a withering look of indignation, while Amy trembled, and dreaded what, from the manners of the ruffians, was likely to follow, "why do you thus obstruct us? Let us pass, or there may be those at hand, who know how to resent such unpardonable conduct."

"Brayvo!" exclaimed the Sprig of Myrtle admiringly, "that here's vot I calls pluck, an' not no mistake, an' Mr. Sam Filcher's the wery gemmen as guvs yer credit for it."

"Ah, that name—that voice!" ejaculated Phoebe and Amy in a breath, and a feeling of the utmost terror and disgust coming over them as they looked more narrowly in the villain's forbidding countenance; "can it be?"

"In course it is," replied Sam, "yer has

the bixtrim feeleecity an' onner of a speakin' to no less a svell than Mr. Samivel Filcher, Eskeveer, the Sprig of Myrtle, an' the pride of Vestminister, him as fit Hookem Snivey, an' vopt him like smoke. An' this here is yer old an' wery much respected friend, Captain Beaufort, vot vos the former pal of yer old pertikler, Lord Selborne, Miss Phoebe, an' yer most dewoted hadmirer, Miss Amy. Now then, captain, don't be so preshus bashful, but flare up, an' speak for yerself."

"Will the beauteous and amiable Miss Phoebe Mayfield, I ask pardon, Lady Selborne, I mean, permit an old acquaintance to pay his respects to her?" said the villain Beaufort, with all his former boldness of manner, "and you, my sweet Amy, whose angelic form is enshrined in my heart, and has never been absent from my memory a moment since last we met, may I be allowed to assure you of the pleasure I feel in again beholding you, and of the continuance of my heart's fondest and most ardent devotion."

"Brayvo, captain, fust rate," cried the eulogistic Sam Filcher, "I'm sure as how these here blessed ladies must feel that here as a wery great complermint, kimmin' as it does from you. Now, my buttercups, vot have yer got to say? Ain't yer goin' to invite us to supper? If it's only a cold fowl or two, ve're not pertikler, vith sich a pair of ducks as yerselves. Ve'll make shift vith it, von't ve, captain, eh?"

"Villains, shameless villains!" exclaimed Phoebe, her bosom swelling with indignation, while Amy's cheeks were suffused with the blushes of offended modesty, "dare not to insult us longer, or you may have bitter cause to repent it."

"Vot," exclaimed Sam, with a look of affected surprise, "yer don't mean to say as how ye're offended at our civility, does yer? Never, it can't be. Howsomdever, vith all doo hindifference, ve ain't a goin' to have the cold shoulder. Now, I say, captain, be up to yer vork, vill yer? S'pose as how I jist snatches a kiss from these here pretty lips of Lady Selborne, vwhile yer does ditto from them here of yer old flame Miss Amy. Here goes."

With these words the unmanly scoundrel dared to throw his arms around the waist of our heroine, and attempted to carry his insolent and disgusting threats into execution, while Beaufort, not any more backward, especially as he was under the influence of drink, of which himself and Sam Filcher had freely partaken, made similar bold advances towards the terrified Amy.

Shocked and alarmed, for they well knew that two such reckless and hardened villains were fully capable of any outrage however atrocious it might be, Phoebe and her com-

panion shrieked aloud for help, and struggled to release themselves from the hated embraces of the ruffians, but that had no other effect on the latter than to make them more bold and determined, especially as they imagined there was no one near to interrupt them, and again and again did they pollute the lips of the blushing damsels with their odious kisses, in spite of all their resistance and cries for help, but suddenly lights were seen to proceed from the farm, followed by the forms of several men, and Sam Filcher and Beaufort, alarmed for their own personal safety, seeing the odds they would have to contend with, immediately released their hold of Phoebe and Amy, and made a precipitate retreat, just at the moment that Henry Ashford and several of the farm servants arrived at the spot.

"Pursue those two scoundrels," said our hero, addressing himself to his men, and pointing after the retreating forms of Beaufort and Sam Filcher, "and secure them if possible. They have been guilty of some daring outrage, that's quite evident."

The men immediately obeyed, and Henry looking anxiously and impatiently at Phoebe and his sister, said—

"For heaven's sake what is the meaning of this? Who are those ruffians that have thus dared to insult you?"

"The villains Beaufort and Filcher," replied our heroine, with a shudder, while blushes of shame and offended modesty suffused the cheeks of herself and Amy.

"Beaufort, Filcher," repeated the astonished and indignant Henry, "is it possible that they have again ventured to this neighbourhood?"

"It is too true," said Amy, "and most cruelly have Phoebe and myself been subjected to their insolence."

"The heartless miscreants," said the enraged Henry, "would that I had been in time to cut off their retreat, and to punish them for their brutal and daring conduct as they deserved. What base designs can they have in contemplation to cause them to visit this neighbourhood after so long an absence, and when they know that the officers of justice have long been in search of them?"

"It is impossible to say," returned Phoebe, "and I cannot but feel alarmed at the circumstance. But come, Henry, let us into the farm, and endeavour to compose ourselves after this alarming adventure."

Henry again expressed his indignation, and his regret that he had not arrived sooner on the spot, and then taking the arms of Phoebe and his sister—after looking in the direction in which Sam Filcher and Beaufort had taken flight, with the hope of ascertaining whether or no his men had been successful in overtaking and securing them—he

conducted them into the farm, to which he had only returned a few minutes before they raised the alarm with their cries.

CHAPTER CII.

HOW BEAUFORT AND FILCHER CONDUCTED THEMSELVES.

"Damn 'em for a hinterruptin' on us when ve vos likely to have such pretty sport," observed Mr. Sam Filcher to his companion, after they had scampered away to some distance from the farm, and they were compelled to pause for a minute to take breath.

"Yes," returned Beaufort, "it was vexing, but it was rather a bold and dangerous step on our part to venture to the farm."

"Bold; not a bit of it," said Sam, "an' I means for to say as gemmen sich as us has a hundoubted right to go a poachin' when an' where ve please."

"True," coincided Beaufort, "but gentlemen such as us, seeing that we might find ourselves safely lodged in prison, and called to a more severe account for our deeds past and present, than would be altogether pleasant, should never forget to follow the wise old maxim, as you and I have done in the present instance, namely, 'discretion's the better part of valour.'"

"Walour," repeated Filcher, scornfully, "yer doesn't mean to doubt the pluck of the Sprig of Myrtle, does yer? There vos rayther too many on 'em, or bless'd if I wouldn't have had a shy if I'd lost my stick."

The voice of men at some short distance now smote their ears.

"They're arter us," said Filcher, "an' mean havin' us, too, if they can; but I doesn't agree to that here, it might prevent our journey on the kontinent an' vot'd the world of fashun say to that here."

The men who were in pursuit of them now appeared at the end of the green lane the two ruffians were traversing, and observing them, uttered a shout and quickened their speed.

"There they are sure enuff," said Sam, "I s'pose the gals has made us known, and that here's rayther dangerous. So as needs must when the devil drives, jist put yer best leg fust, captain; off ve goes like great guns an' the devil take the hindmost."

Beaufort needed not the advice, for the little courage the drink he had partaken of had inspired him with, was quite exhausted, and he was off at a tangent.

And it must be confessed that Sam Filcher never ran faster in his life, except when he first started on the road to ruin.

It was a great pedestrian feat on his part,

certainly, and we think no one will venture to deny its prudence; still we must say that it was rather remarkable for a gentleman of his distinguished valour and daring, to be so ready to display on that occasion what some ill-natured persons might call the white feather. However, we presume it was one of the gallant "purfeshnul's" eccentricities, to which we believe all noble and heroic spirits are more or less prone.

On then the two worthies dashed, with the speed of the whirlwind, appearing to set time and space at defiance; along the lane, across the fields, leaping gates and turn-stiles, over ditches, and forcing their way through hedges, regardless of their clothes, their faces, and hands, suffering nothing, in fact, to obstruct them in their rapid progress.

And it must be admitted that their pursuers displayed an equal amount of agility and activity, keeping them within sight, and at times gaining fast upon them.

The villains began to feel winded, and to fear that, after all, they should have to make a bold stand and fight for it, or yield, especially as only a few yards now separated them from their pursuers.

However, they determined to make one more desperate effort, and turning a little to the right, and forcing their way through a clump of trees, found themselves, to their discomfiture and disappointment, impeded by a muddy pond.

They had no time to hesitate, however, they were nearly in the clutches of their pursuers, who no doubt made sure of capturing them, so into the pond they rushed up to their waists, and waded it to the opposite bank, which they had just gained and landed, when the men appeared, but stood and gazed after them, evidently vexed and disappointed, though not inclined to follow their example.

"There yer air, my rum uns," shouted Sam Filcher, exultingly, at the top of his voice, "how d'yer find yer blessed selves arter that here pleasant bit of hexercise? Vot about this here preshus pond? I fancy it licks yer, eh? Ha, ha, ha! good night, an' pleasant dreams to yer."

With these friendly observations and wishes at parting, Sam Filcher turned upon his heel, followed by Beaufort, and the men having watched them till they were hid from their sight in the darkness, slowly retraced their steps, vexed to think that they had exerted themselves so greatly to no purpose.

Sam and his companion were not in altogether a comfortable condition, their small clothes saturated with wet, and covered with mud, and having proceeded a short distance they stopped to recover themselves, and to consider how they should further pursue their way.

"Vell," observed Sam, "here ve air ag'in, captain, all safe an' sound. Ve've done them here blessed yokels vot meant grabbin' us nicely, arter all."

"Yes," replied Beaufort, sulkily, "an' a pretty mess we have made of it. Curse the farm, I should never have thought of visiting it, if it hadn't been for you."

"Vot air yer grumbling about now?" demanded Sam, "ye're never satisfied, vot if ve have got a little vet an' dirty, an' rayther damaged our pers'nal appearance, van't it better to take to the pond than to take our lodgin' in prison, as ve sartinly should have done if ve had been cotched being so vell known."

"Yes," returned Beaufort, "and as we very soon shall be, I have no doubt, after this adventure, which will put the traps upon the right scent."

"Gammon an' all," said Filcher, "our time isn't come yet, depend on it. But ye're allus a dropping down upon yer luck about trifles. Now, for my part, I've a preshus good mind to return to the farm in a hour or two, when all's keviet an' there's no von about."

"What for?" interrogated Beaufort.

"Why, for a little bit of rewenge."

"What do you mean?"

"Vot, I say. Mister Harry Ashford is a gettin' on too vell in the world, an' that makes him sarcey. Ve both on as owe him a grudge. Now s'posing that farm of his'n vos to happen to be in a blaze, an' vos to be destroyed, eh? Mightn't that here take some of the conceit out of him, eh? Asides there might be summat to be got in the scramble. I've got a fosfirous an' matches yer know, so vot say yer?"

Beaufort looked at the consummate miscreant with the most unmitigated horror and disgust.

"What fiend of hell put that thought into your head?" he demanded, "are you never happy but when—"

"I'm at b'sness," interrupted Sam, "to be sure I am't, but yer so squeamish about trifles. But kim along, ve'll talk about this here some other time. Ve must find some place or t'other if ve can, where ve can dry an' clean ourselves, an' put our vardrobe into order, afore ve appears in daylight."

They walked on in silence for some distance, Beaufort not being disposed to continue the conversation in his present mood, and feeling anything but easy and comfortable.

The sight of our heroine had recalled many unpleasant thoughts to his mind, and his guilty conscience again reproached him severely.

The moon had now become overclouded, and the night threatened to be anything but

cheerful. The way, too, they were travelling was dismal enough, and by no means calculated to raise the spirits, as it was through a thick wood, which at times was almost impenetrable.

Suddenly they paused as distant sounds saluted their ears

"What is that?" said Beaufort, hastily.

"Vhy," answered Sam, "it sounds wery much like singin', an' I should say not by one or two indiwiduals only. Listen."

They did so attentively, and, as the sounds were borne more distinctly upon the night breeze, it became evident that Sam was right, and that a number of persons were singing together in chorus at no great distance.

"Vell, they seems merry enuff," said Sam, "an' I should think ve might find 'em wery jolly companions, if ve vos only to hinteraduce ourselves. I vonder whether there is any crib at hand. Ve must see. Kim along."

"And yet there might be danger," suggested Beaufort.

"There yer air, funkin' ag'in as usiwal," said Filcher, "kim along, I say, ve'll chance it."

Beaufort raised no further objection, and they walked hastily on in the direction from which the sounds proceeded, and had soon arrived so near that they could plainly hear the following words, sung by several voices, male and female—

Round the cheerful wood fire throng,
Troll the merry, merry gipsy song;
Let the hours be passed in glee,
For happy rovers all are we.
In the bonny greenwood shade,
In the dell and in the glade,
Wheresoe'er the gipsy roam,
He can make his happy home.

Then troll the merry, merry gipsy song,
As we round the wood fire throng,
Let the hours pass light and free,
As the gipsy's life should be.

'Neath sunlit skies, bright moon and star,
The wandering gipsy roams afar,
The world's his kingdom, none can share
Its choicest gifts with brow of care.
No marble halls has he to boast,
Nor has he serfs a cringing host;
Yet merrily he loves to dwell

Where grows the cowslip and blue-bell.

Then troll the merry, merry gipsy lay,
When after close of summer day,
The gipsy to his tent shall roam.
Contented in his woodland home.

This simple effusion was sung with hearty good will and spirit, and had a pleasing effect at that still hour of the night, and in a place where all was so particularly dull and cheerless, and even the two ruffians Beaufort and Sam Filcher could not help admiring it.

"Brayvo, gipsies!" said the latter gentleman, "yer persess woful debilities of no

mean horder, as the moosical crickets or commonseurs says, an' Sam Filcher puts his weto to that here, an' not no mistake. Now who'd hav' thought ve should meet vith sich jovial comp'ny in sich a place as this here, and at sich a'our of the night? Its lucky tho', ain't it, captain, eh?"

"It may be," answered Beaufort, sullenly. "It must be."

"If we may venture among them."

"An' vhy shouldn't ve?" demanded Sam, "ain't ve all prigs alike, tho' ve've a diff'rent vay of vorkin' the horakel? To be sure ve air, so kim along, an' ve shall find ourselves kevite at home among 'em, never fear."

Beaufort reluctantly obeyed, for he always had his fears and suspicions.

After proceeding for some short distance further in the direction from which they had heard the chorus, and breaking from among the more thickly clustering trees, the light of the different wood fires they had kindled on the earth before their tents, met the sight of Beaufort and his companion, and they caught a partial and indistinct view of the gipsy encampment, and which was situated in a pleasant dell, and overshadowed by luxuriantly foliated trees.

"This here's a wery pleasant sight an' not no gammon," observed Mr. Sam Filcher, "an' we ought to bless our lucky stars for it, only ye're sich a hungrateful feller. I feels the varmeth of the fire already a dryin' of my hinexpressibels, an' it's not wery likely that those that can chant so merrily would be vithout summat good to vhet their whistle. If they have got it, von't I not pay my respects to it, an' no mistake."

Stimulated by this refreshing idea, Mr. Sam Filcher quickened his speed, followed by Beaufort, and in a few minutes they had a full view of the gipsy encampment, and the persons assembled.

CHAPTER CIII.

THE GIPSIES.—SAM AND BEAUFORT AT HOME.

It was at once a striking and romantic sight, and formed a picture worthy of the pencil of the artist.

Several tents formed the encampment, before and near which several swarthy looking men and lads, black-eyed, pretty-looking gipsy girls, matronly women, half-naked children, and withered old crones, were grouped in every variety of picturesque attitude, some conversing together, in small knots or parties at intervals, others lounging upon the grass, smoking and regaling themselves.

There were two or three cheerful fires at a short distance from the tents, over which were hung iron-pots, containing the food cooking for their supper. Two or three covered travelling carts might also be seen with the horses grazing about.

The gipsies were all too busily engaged to notice the intruders, and Sam and Beaufort stood for a few minutes to observe them before they ventured to reveal themselves.

They appeared to be remarkably merry, for frequent peals of laughter escaped them, which rang joyfully through the wood, and showed that dull care, at any rate, was not one of the ingredients of their nature.

"Vot d'yer think of this here for a change," said Sam, "doesn't it do them here preshus hopticks of your'n good to see? Ve shall be as right as a trevit among 'em, never fear."

"Don't make too sure of that," replied Beaufort, "for the wandering tribe are not to be depended upon at all times, and they might be inclined to look upon us with suspicion."

"Stuff!" returned Sam, impatiently, "I never see sich a cove in all my blessed life as yer air. Ye're allwas a croaking out some suspicion or t'other. But its not no use of us a standin' here, so ve may as vell hinteradouce ourselves at vonce."

Beaufort still hesitated, but Sam taking his arm, forced him forward, and they presently stood in the midst of the motley throng.

They started on beholding two strangers appear so suddenly, and at such an hour of the night among them, the men eyeing them with stern and suspicious looks, and seeming to think them far from welcome.

Sam Filcher, however, was not at all daunted or abashed, and returned their searching looks with interest, at the same time smiling most graciously and insinuatingly upon the females, and scraping two or three friendly nods and bows to the men, which they did not seem much disposed to return.

Beaufort felt far from easy, and he would much rather that he and Sam had had to wander all night in the dreary forest, than have encountered the gipsies.

At length one of the men—a tall, muscular, powerful-looking fellow, who, from his manner seemed to possess some authority—after consulting with his companions for a minute or two, advancing towards the spot where Sam Filcher and Beaufort were standing, and eyeing them narrowly, demanded who they were and what they wanted.

"All right, old fellow," politely returned Sam, "yer've nuffin to be afear'd on, I tells yer'. Ve're a couple of the right sort, an' so yer'll find if yer only tries us. Yer seed ve're in a bit of a fix jist now, in the fust

place, ve're wery hungry an' thirsty, an' wery tired, an' in the next place ve're had a bit of a haccident by tumblin' into a horse-pond, an' are rayther vet an' dirty. Can yer relieve us, my flower?"

"The gipsy is not churlish of his favours, master," replied the man, gruffly, "if he thinks they are not ill bestowed. Those who try to deceive him had better look to it."

"Wery good," said Sam, in a complimentary tone, "ye're a trump, I see, them here blessed words as yer jist now spoke is 'xactly my sentiments. So I s'pose myself an' my friend here's keвите velcum?"

"I'll see," answered the gipsy, "stop here while I consult my companions."

"Good ag'in," said Filcher, approvingly; "oh, yer'e'll find me an' my pal a couple of out an' outers an' not no mistake."

The gipsy returned no answer to this, but quitted them and rejoined his companions.

"Vell," said Sam, addressing himself in a confident tone to Beaufort, "how d'yer feel now?"

"Not any too sanguine," was the reply; "I did not half like the way the fellow scanned us, and the looks of suspicion with which he eyed us."

"You're a fool."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Beaufort, "we shall see."

"Hold," said Filcher, "an' jist yer keep yer doubts an' surspishuns to yerself, for see, the man as spoke to us an' two or three other gipsies are coming this way. Eh, vot blessed if ever I seed sich a likeness afore."

"What do you mean?" interrogated Beaufort, hastily.

"Vhy, I think I knows vun on 'em," replied Sam, "an' if so its all right. My prehus eyes! if its not he, I nivier vos so mistaken in my life afore."

The gipsies had now arrived at the spot where Beaufort and Filcher were awaiting them, and the latter immediately starting forward and grasping the hand of one of them—a sturdy looking, middle-aged fellow—exclaimed in a tone of surprise and pleasure:—

"Vot! no, it can't be, yes it is! vell, I never! vot! my old pertikler, Gipsy Ned! is it yer? Doesn't yer know me?"

"Sam Filcher, the Sprig of Myrtle, alive and kicking!" said the gipsy, with equal astonishment and apparent satisfaction; "is it possible?"

"In course it is, my old buttercup," returned Sam again in the warmth of his friendly feelings, shaking Gipsy Ned, as he had called him, heartily by the hand, "vell this is a 'appy meetin' an' no gammon."

"I thought you'd been topped or lagged, years ago, Sam," said Ned.

"Cut it," returned Sam, with a wry face,

and passing his fingers in an uneasy manner about his neck, "that's rayther a ticklish subject yer know. I s'pose as how yer'e satisfied now, old feller, ain't yer?" he added, speaking to the gipsy who had first introduced himself to him and Beaufort.

The man replied in the affirmative, and then on his invitation and that of Gipsy Ned, Sam and Beaufort accompanied them to the encampment, where they were introduced to the other gipsies, by whom they were welcomed with the same bluff and hearty good will as if they had been on the most intimate terms for years, Sam with his characteristic gallantry, endeavouring to make himself perfectly agreeable to the black-eyed gipsy-girls, who particularly attracted his attention and admiration.

Beaufort also began to feel himself more at his ease, and was rather amused at the novelty of his situation, and at the rude but hearty good nature of the wandering tribe.

Seated in one of the principal tents, with a plenteous repast, composed of not the most unsavoury of viands placed before them, with a goodly supply of ale and spirits to wash it down, Mr. Sam Filcher and Beaufort soon felt themselves quite at home, and chatted, and joked, and laughed with their swarthy companions in right good humour, and with much spirit.

"Vell," said Sam, "this here is vot I calls doin' the agreeabel, fust rate; if it vosn't as I'm hinged, an' I has sich a pertikler love for my purfeshun, bless'd if I should mind turning gipsy myself. Speshully," he added, winking and leering amorously at a pretty female member of the tribe who sat opposite to him, "if I could only vin the *infections* of sich a lovely young creetur as that here. I say, my dear, can yer tell the fortins of myself an' my friend the captain here?"

The gipsy girl looked at Sam and Beaufort for a minute or two, with a strange, and even a solemn expression, and then replied:—

"Your fortunes? yes, but Zara need not tell ye, witness the death of a criminal, and ye may see your fortunes written on the gallows-tree!"

Beaufort started, turned ghastly pale, and trembled in every limb, and even the hardened and reckless Sam Filcher exhibited some uneasiness, and regretted that he should have provoked such an unpleasant reply by the question he had put.

"Come, I say young 'oman," he remarked, "hexcuse me, but I think that here's a little too pers'nal, I didn't ax yer for that."

"The hangman's pay is not so liberal," returned the gipsy-girl, pointedly, "that he will not suffer himself to be robbed of his just due, depend upon it. Let yourself and your friend think of that before you again

ask your fortunes; it is worthy of your consideration."

Thus saying, the singular girl arose from her seat, and abruptly quitted the tent, much to the relief of Beaufort, whose cowardly fears were excited to the utmost degree, especially when he observed that the eyes of the whole of the gipsies present were fixed with a marked and suspicious expression upon himself and Sam Filcher, whom he more than ever cursed in his heart, for his fool-hardihood and levity.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Gipsy Ned, "young Zara hit you and your friend rather hard, Sam, but of course you didn't feel it."

"Jist drop the subject, vill yer, Ned?" said Sam, "a joke's a joke, not as I minds it a bit, but sich a von as that here, some how or to'her, allus makes the captain so preshusly narwous."

"Zara is a strange girl," observed Ned, "and gets more money by fortune telling than any other female of our tribe."

"Vell," said Filcher, "I wish yer'd say no more about it. S'pose ve have a song or two if it's agreeable, an' then me an the captain vill jist take a bit of a snooze, if yer'll allow us, for ve must be hoff ag'in by daylight in the morning."

This proposition was immediately agreed to, and several songs and choruses of not the most refined description, were sung by the gipsies, and the ever willing Sam Filcher, with much uproarious noise, if not vocal ability, of which amusement they having at length had sufficient, Sam and Beaufort were shown to their sleeping place—which was in one of the covered carts before mentioned—the lights were shortly afterwards extinguished in the different tents, and silence soon afterwards reigned in the gipsy encampment.

CHAPTER CIII.

THE EXECUTION.

But the slumbers of Beaufort were of that troubled description which a guilty conscience never fails to produce. The remarkable words which the gipsy girl, Zara had uttered, in reply to the imprudent question of Sam Filcher, and emphatic and prophetic manner in which they were spoken, had left a painful and fearful impression upon his mind which he could not remove, and they conjured up to his affrighted imagination dreams that continued to haunt him when he woke, and shook his guilty soul with terror.

He felt relieved when daylight appeared, and the bustle in the different tents among

the gipsies, gave some life and cheerfulness to the scene.

He aroused Sam Filcher, who still continued to sleep soundly, and to snore, as he was accustomed to do, so loudly that he might be heard all over the encampment, and that worthy having, as he expressed it, "pulled himself together a bit," they quitted the cart which had formed their chamber, and repaired to the principal tent to take leave of the gipsies, and to thank them for their hospitality, previous to their resuming their journey, which Beaufort in particular was very anxious to do.

That task was soon accomplished, and Sam having—with his characteristic generosity—insisted upon the gipsies taking some remuneration for their kindness, and which it can only with truth be stated they were extremely loth to decline, they immediately departed.

The two worthy gentlemen proceeded to some distance without exchanging a word with each other, they appearing both to be too busily occupied with their own thoughts to enter into conversation.

But at length Sam Filcher broke the silence.

"Vell, captain," he said, "vot d'yer think of the gipsies? Arn't they trumps all of 'em? an' vosn't it lucky as ve fell in vith 'em?"

"No I don't," answered Beaufort, laconically.

"Yer don't?"

"I don't."

"Vhy?"

"Because if we had not, we should not have had our fortunes so prophetically told by that confounded gipsy girl."

"Oh, then yer didn't like vot she said?"

"No, it has haunted me ever since, and the more so, because she spoke the truth."

"An' vot if she did?" said Filcher, "it vos nuffin new to us, vos it? Ve know that here vill be our fate some time or t'other, yer've made up yer mind to that long ago, haven't yer? If yer haven't I have, an' so vot's the use of makin' yer preshus life miserable?"

"Oh, Filcher," said Beaufort, "and can you indeed talk thus lightly of the ignominious and awful fate which too certainly awaits us?"

"In course I can," answered Sam, coolly, "vot's the use of crying about it? that here von't save our unlucky necks from the 'alter, or put it hoff for a day when the time comes. But enuff of that here. Ve had better make the best of our vay, for I vants to get to the City of York afore dinner time."

"What are you going to York for?"

"I'll tell yer when ve gets there. Come along, ve air all right now."

Beaufort looked at him fearfully and sus-



piciously, but made no further observation, and they then proceeded on their way at a brisk pace.

It was a disagreeable morning, very cold for the time of the year, dull and hazy, with a heavy, lowering sky, and a slow, drizzling rain. But Sam Filcher and his companion noticed not the weather, their guilty minds were both too busily occupied to permit them to do that.

Sam Filcher, however, quickly aroused himself from the melancholy train of thought—so unnatural to him—into which he had apparently fallen, and placing his stick under his arm, and thrusting his hands into his pockets, he proceeded to cheer his drooping spirits after his usual fashion, namely, by singing and whistling alternately, much to the annoyance of Beaufort, whose gloomy

meditations it at times greatly interrupted. The prophetic words of the gipsy girl, Zara, still seemed to ring in his ears, and excited in his guilty breast the utmost terror, and the most dismal forebodings.

"Now then," at length said Sam, in his usual mild and amiable style, "having grown tired of the monotony of whistling and singing, and turning round to Beaufort, who was walking some short distance behind him, occupied in the gloomy manner we have been describing, "vot air yer skulkin' there for, when time is preshus? Yer can't be tired arter that here cumfutable doss ve had in the drag. Jist vake up, vill yer, an' open them here blessed daylight's of yourn. Ve've got some miles to valk yet, afore ve gets to York, an' I wouldn't miss being there afore twelve o'clock to be made a hemp'r'er."

"Why are you so anxious to get to York?"

"Yer'll see by an' by."

"Can you not tell me now?"

"Air yer pertikler curious to know?"

"Yes."

"Then wait patiently, as yer tender mother did for yer."

"You seem obstinately resolved to rush into danger, Sam," said Beaufort, "we ought to be careful to avoid all great towns or cities, such a place as York in particular."

"Ye're at it ag'in, air yer?" said Sam, "as usiwal, o torturin' yerself with all sorts of fears about nuffin. But I tells yer, I wouldn't be there behind time for all the world."

"Then why cannot you let me know what it is you're going upon?"

"Becos I doesn't choose. Yer'll be astonished."

"How so?"

"Yer'll see; come, step out."

Beaufort muttered an oath between his teeth, but not sufficiently loud for Sam Filcher to hear, and his fears and anxiety increased.

The looks of the villain convinced him that he had some guilty design in contemplation, and his coward fears made him fear the worst.

And then the idea of venturing to such a place as the City of York, awakened all his dread of detection, and he trembled at the thoughts and fears which crowded upon and distracted his brain.

Again the words of Zara recurred to his memory, and his terrors increased to an almost insupportable degree.

But Mr. Sam Filcher seemed again to be perfectly at his ease, and sung song after song with much gusto, and greatly to the amusement of himself, until he had completely exhausted his stock, which was rather an extensive one, when he re-commenced, and ran through the whole again, with much spirit.

And thus they continued to journey on at a brisk pace for some miles, until entering upon the high road, after proceeding for some distance along it, they suddenly alighted upon a friendly tavern, which was open, and before the door of which Sam immediately halted.

"Ah," said Sam, congratulating himself, "this is jist the ticket; it's vot I've been a longing to see for this here hour an a half. I feels rayther peckish, so ve may as vell have summat to eat an' drink here. Vot say yer, captain?"

Beaufort raised no objection to this sensible proposition, for he himself felt rather hungry, so they walked into the house without any further hesitation, and called for what they wanted.

They were quickly accommodated, and Mr. Sam Filcher the more especially, enjoyed himself right heartily, consuming as much food, and luxuriating in as much drink as might reasonably have been expected to satisfy any moderate appetite for a couple of days at the least.

"Now then that here's over," he said, when he had come to the conclusion of his meal, "as time is on the wing, as Milton hobserwes in his celebrayted poem of 'Chivey Chase,' ve'd better step it, or ve shall be too late for the sport, which 'ud be a mollar-choly job."

"What sport?" eagerly interrogated Beaufort, trusting that Sam Filcher was now more disposed to be communicative respecting the important business which called him to York in such a hurry.

"Yer'll know that by-an'-by, I tell yer ag'in," replied Sam.

"Why do you hesitate to tell me now?" asked Beaufort, impatiently.

"Cos it don't suit me to do so," was Sam's provoking answer; "asides, I wants yer to have a agreeable surprise."

"A surprise!"

"Yes, a startler."

"I do not understand you."

"I don't vont yer to do so."

"Sam," said Beaufort, looking at him suspiciously, "I like not this mystery. It bodes no good, and I have my misgivings."

"In course yer has," answered Filcher, "yer allus has, an' that makes yer sich a rank cur that I'm 'shamed on yer. Howsomdever, I'm only a goin' to take yer to see an old friend."

"An old friend?" repeated Beaufort, still more vexed and bewildered at the ambiguity of Sam.

"I said a *old friend*," answered Sam, emphatically.

"Who do you mean?"

"There, yer vonts to know too much, all in good time, captain. But come, ve must be off."

Beaufort saw that it was quite useless to endeavour to elicit anything from the ruffian, so he put no further questions to him, and Sam having paid the reckoning "like a gemman," as he complimented himself, they left the room in which they had been sitting, and walked to the door of the inn.

Just as they did so, a light cart, driven by a simple-looking countryman, stopped at the door, and the man alighted with the intention of getting a glass of something to drink.

Sam Filcher, with an agreeable smile upon his countenance, walked up to this interesting bumpkin, and graciously extending his hand to him, addressed him in the following familiar and polite terms.

"Vell, my daisy, now who'd a thought of

seein' of yer? haycorns is plentiful, an' pigs is a pickin' hup a bit, an' that here's the reason, I s'pose as yer lookin' so fresh an' vell. How's yer mortil remains? How's yer blessed mother? How's that rewered pariental father of your'n, an' is yer wife all right, an' the kids, is they alive an' askreekin' as I hopes they is, cos that's the only vay to henjoy matteromony an' singel blast—blessidness I mean. Hixcuse my bad Frinch, if yer please, *comin' with pot or two, sev'ral plates, mountseer.*"

The interesting countryman before mentioned stared aghast, with jaws distended, at this remarkable burst of eloquence, and was evidently for some moments at a loss how to express his admiration of the gentleman who could with the greatest possible ease imaginable, make such an' oratorical display, and somewhat in the dark, at the same time, as to what he meant, although he had a vague idea that, at the least, he must be an M.P., for no other animal—he considered, and we cannot help endorsing his opinion—could make use of the same amount of nothing and nonsense in the same short space of time.

Sam Filcher smiled, graciously, the countryman grinned a broad grin, so broad, in fact, that it not only extended all over his face—which measured some inches over the circumference of a punch-bowl—but even titillated over his corpus, agitating convulsively his smock-frock, and thence descending to the place where his calves ought to have been, only they had died an untimely death in those boots, with monstrous soles, that he would persist in having thonged nearly to his knees, and he then recovered himself sufficiently to express himself in the following terms:—

"Ye be's a rum 'un, zur, I don't com' to ye disactly, coz ye zee's I bean't no scholard, but, dang it, I does loike ye somehow, coz yer spak's just loike squeerie, my measter that be ye mun know, an' I be his mon, Roger Rumble, Rumble, zen, that be'st my neame."

"I know'd it vos," said Sam, again grasping the hand of the countryman—that hand, which from its size and symmetry, almost deserved to be dignified into the title of a paw—and shaking it so vigorously that it was really marvellous it did not bring hand, with the arm attached to it, from socket, "I know'd it vos, I'm proud to see yer, Mister Rumble—vot a remarkably pretty name, ain't it captain?—I've a very pertickler vish to patternize yer."

Roger Rumble did not understand that word "patternize" in either its literal, or any other sense, he therefore grinned at Sam Filcher for an explanation, which the latter gentleman very quickly and concisely gave him.

"Ye're agoin' to York, ain't yer?" he interrogated.

"Ees, zur, dang it how did ye know that?" replied Roger Rumble.

"Cos I knowed it," was the very explanatory answer of Mr. Sam Filcher; "I and my friend here, this here gemman, is a goin' there too, an' so I s'pose if I stan's summat to drink, and does the thing vot is hansum, ve can have a lift in that here weheykle of yourn, eh?"

Roger Rumble was of course, quite agreeable to that, so the bargain was struck instantly, the drink was drunk, and so, almost were the drinkers, into the cart jumped Sam, Beaufort, and Roger Rumble, and off they went at a rattling pace along the road towards the good City of York.

"Great doin's in York, this mornin', isn't there, Roger?" inquired Sam,

"Ees, ees," replied Roger, "there be a mon goin' to be hung."

Beaufort shuddered, fixed his eyes keenly upon Sam Filcher, and remembering the words of the gipsy-girl, shuddered still more.

"Yes," said Sam, "that's the wery hidetical b'sness as calls me an' my pal there, ain't it, captain?"

"Sam," replied Beaufort, with a look of unmitigated horror and disgust, "what devil's motive has prompted you to this?"

"It's my fad," was the reply, "an' I hopes yer'll enjoy it."

"It a pretty sight to make a holiday on, bean't it, zur?" observed the intellectual and kind-hearted Mr. Roger Rumble, with a heavy sigh at the same time, which was meant, no doubt, to convey his regret that the said "pretty sight" did not occur every day.

"Yes," answered Sam, "wery pretty, an' wery hinstructiv' too, speshully vhen the principul hacter does his part to rights, an' arter dancing a hornpipe upon summat, dances a hornpipe upon nuffin, an' dies game, an' the fogle hunters does their part vith the pockets, of hinnocent hindividuals enjoyin' of their treat under the gallows, vhere the poor devil is a goin' through his performance, an' a kickin his heels about like von o'clock. Wery pretty! von of the noblest hornmints of the British conster-tuishun."

"Wretch! brutal wretch!" Beaufort could not help exclaiming at this frightful speech from the lips of Filcher, "are you entirely lost to every sense of decency or humanity?"

"Hold hard, captain," returned Filcher, clenching his fists, and looking what he meant, "better langidge, if yer please, vhen yer undressin' of yerself to a gemman, or yer might chance to find these here mawleys about that here preshus nob of yourn in not no time at all, an' not no gammon, and that

here's a wisit as I rayther thinks yer vouldn't above half fancy."

"I'll not proceed any further," said Beaufort, jumping up in the cart, "I will not accompany you on such a devil's errand."

"But yer vill," returned Sam, resolutely, laying hold of the skirt of Beaufort's coat, and pulling him back into his seat; "yer'll jist do as I thinks proper, an' not no mistake about that here votsumdever, so, yer see yer might as vell take it coolly."

"Be ye ill, zur, vary ill?" compassionately inquired Roger Rumble, giving the one eyed horse an extra dose of whip-cord, by way of aggravating him into a quicker pace, with the full sanction and approbation of Sam.

"Yes," replied the latter gentleman, "he is rather narvous, an' he's lost a tile, so take no notice vot he ses or does, Mister Rumble. He's perfickly harmless, tho' he costes me no hend hoff hanxiety of mind, I 'shure's yer."

"Ah!" sighed Roger Rumble, commiserating the afflicted one—that is to say Beaufort—and most deeply sympathising with his humane keeper—that is to say Mr. Sam Filcher in the painful position he was placed in, and the great responsibility which rested upon his shoulders.

As for the unhappy Beaufort, feeling but too bitterly the power which Sam Filcher held over him, and his own utter inability to resist it, he could only endeavour to resign himself to his fate, although the thoughts and feelings that agitated him may be far better imagined than described.

"Filcher," he at length found courage to say, in a supplicatory and expostulatory tone, "let us not go to York, this morning, at any rate."

"Stuff!" returned Sam, "this here's the wery mornin' as I vishes to be there, an' means to be there. Ye're a flat, captain, an' don't not know the treat I've got for yer there."

"A treat!" faltered out the wretched Beaufort, with a look of the most undisguised horror and disgust.

"Yes, a treat," repeated Filcher, "that here is if yer only knows how to deprehiate it."

"Forbear!" said Beaufort, "villain though I confess to be such brutal observations in reference to the ignominious fate of a guilty wretch like ourselves, is most revolting to my ears."

"Now then," exclaimed Sam, grasping him fiercely by the arm, and fixing upon him a threatening look, "yer'd better cut it at vonce, yer hunderstan's me? Vot air yer goin' for to blow the gaff, eh?"

Beaufort could not suppress a groan, in the agony of his feelings.

All that had been observed by Sam Filcher and Beaufort was perfectly Geek or Hebrew

to the simple Roger Rumble, who could only stare his hardest, and gape his widest, while he continued to lash the one eyed horse into a still quicker pace, much to the satisfaction of Sam, who was fearful lest by the least delay he might lose the "treat" he anticipated.

"Telve o'clock's the usiwal time, isn't it, friend chawbacon?" he asked.

The said "chawbacon" replied in the affirmative.

"Yes," he added, "that be'st the time as they does it for 'em."

"An' wery kind of 'em too," remarked Sam, "to giv' a poor devil time to get his breakfast afore startin' on sich a long journey. Cut along, Master Rumble. Has ve much furdurer to go?"

"Only a matter of five mile I reckon," replied the countryman; "we shall soon be there, if Jemy keeps a goin' as he is now, but sometimes he do have a bit of a knack of stoppin' short like, when his old cough do come on, and dang it, it be no use to try to make him go on then."

"Vell then," said Sam, "he'd better not try that caper jist now, that here's all as I'm got to say. Go along, Jemy, my toolip."

Jemy seemed to understand the latter flattering compliment, and to feel it proudly, for he pricked up his ears, and scampered along the road like steam.

Beaufort relapsed into silence and gloomy meditation, and Sam Filcher commenced singing one of his favourite flash ditties at the top of his voice, with which Roger Rumble was much delighted, and applauded it highly.

As they approached nearer the scene where the awful tragedy was about to take place, numerous greedy "sight seers," who had come near and far to gape at the legal murder of a fellow creature, and luxuriate in the dying agonies of the unfortunate wretch, might be seen hurrying along the road with breathless haste, and exhibiting the utmost possible excitement. Had they been hastening to the death bed of some rich relation, and their whole wordly interests were involved in their punctuality they could not have shown more anxiety than they did on that occasion, such unfortunately is the morbid appetite for the horrible of some individuals, not confined to what are so charitably (?) termed the "lower classes," but prevailing far more extensively among court flunkies, and stiff starched crinolined, simpering, mawkish, dolls of the aristocracy, bearing in their forms, something resembling the form of woman, Jack Ketch and his assistant enlisting all their sympathies and admiration, and revered by them as the greatest of all schoolmasters!

Well, they "pelted along" as Sam Filcher would probably have described it, in red hot

haste, to this feast of the gallows, this victim of the *vengeance* of the law, this banquet of blood, which should generate—if we may be allowed the term—many more murderer's, and consequently many more such luxurious repasts, the lower rabble, the vulgar admirers of such revolting and barbarous exhibitions, and every moment swelled the throng, and every moment as it brought them nearer to the scene of their anticipated enjoyment, the excitement increased.

Streams of individuals, of both sexes—the fair sex by far outnumbering those of the masculine gender—poured from every quarter, all bound for the gallows-tree, and the mortal fruit that so soon was to hang before their gratified sight, suspended from its fatal branch.

But if these disciples of Calcraft, or any other similar lecturer of the gallows, smiled, chuckled, and indulged in their pleasant joke, in anticipation of “the treat”—it being their “day out”—the broad canopy of heaven did not look approvingly, nor did the bright sun deign them more than a casual beam to cheer them on their weary way to the place of instruction, and the presence of the school-master.

Dense masses of clouds hung upon the horizon, and all in nature bore an aspect in perfect unison with the awful event which was so shortly to take place, murder, *not* “in the eye of the law,” but legalised for “the furtherance of the ends of justice.”

Nice distinction, but very hard of digestion.

The reader will understand us not to be advocates of criminals, but denouncers of the barbarous law—so opposed to the enlightenment, the civilisation of the nineteenth century—which makes the gallows-tree so prolific of criminals, sending so many guilty wretches into eternity without time for remorse or repentance.

Well, the stream of hungry “sight seers,” hurried on, and so did the cart containing Roger Rumble, the amiable Mr. Sam Filcher, and his trembling associate in crime, Beaufort, and at length the place where the solemn performance for the amusement of his Majesty's liege subjects was to be celebrated was approached so near, that the hour of eleven might be heard to peal from the bell of York Minster, and the impatience and excitement to reach the fatal spot, in consequence increased.

“Guv Jemy a clip or two under the flank jist to wake him hup,” kindly suggested Sam, “or ve shall never get there in time for the sport, an’ that here’al be a ser’ous disapp’ntment.”

Roger complied with this request, and Jemy was lashed into becoming speed, much to the satisfaction of Mr. Filcher, but quite the

reverse of Beaufort, who, the nearer they approached the place of execution, felt his fears and misgivings increase.

“I vonder vwhether he’ll die a brick,” said Sam; “I thinks as how he vill, I shall feel ashamed of him if he doesn’t.”

This was said in a soliloquising and undertone, and not intended for the ears of either of his companions, Roger Rumble in particular, and the latter did not hear it, paying no attention to anything but Jemy and the persons rushing along the road, but Beaufort did, and the words made him shudder with a still stranger feeling of horror and disgust, which he did not endeavour to conceal.

“Filcher,” he said, fixing upon him a penetrating look, “what fresh torture have you in store for me?”

“Torter,” repeated the brutal wretch, “I tell yer ag’in it’ll be a treat, that is, if he only jist hacts as I hexpects he vill.”

“*He*,” gasped Beaufort, in breathless anxiety, “you know him then?”

“In course I does, an’ so do yer,” was the answer.

“Tell me, tell me, I beg of you,” said Beaufort, “who is he?—what’s his name? for what is he about to suffer?”

“There,” replied Sam, impatiently, “don’t bother me. Yer’ll know presently. Ah, poor feller, his time’s very nigh come, an’ I vish it vosn’t; but it can’t be helped, an’ it’s vot ve must all come to as a nat’ral konsekens.”

This might have been very consolatory to the mind of Mr. Filcher, but it was far different to that of Beaufort, who at that moment felt as if he was being conveyed to execution himself.

And now the journey was so nearly accomplished, that they could catch an indistinct view of York castle, the place of execution, and could even hear the confused hum and buzz from the voices of the vast multitude that for hours had been gathering to witness the frightful spectacle.

CHAPTER CIV.

THE LAST MOMENTS OF A CRIMINAL.

A quarter to twelve! A black sky above, a black scaffold, surmounting a black, grim looking portion of York Castle—that dread building where, like at London's Newgate, so many wretched criminals have been publicly strangled—a dense mass of gaping, anxious, impatient men, women, aye, and even children; ribald jokes, coarse laughter, fearful oaths; pick-pockets busy; pushing, driving, eager watching of the clock, and half muttered curses at the tedious slowness of the hour; imagine all this, and you will

have a pretty faithful picture of the place of execution on that fatal morning.

It was there, and to that enlightened and willing congregation, that the moral lesson of the gallows was to be taught. It was there that murder was to be prevented in future by the legal perpetration of another, and thousands were to be gratified by the interesting sight.

Still more dense became the crowd of impatient spectators, still louder became the buzz and hum of human voices, and still nearer the hand moved towards the fatal hour of twelve.

How short a time remained between the wretched criminal and eternity.

And now the death bell sent forth its dismal knell, giving fearful note of the approach of the unfortunate culprit to his doom; and all eyes were fixed upon the black scaffold, and the door from which the poor wretch was to issue on to it, and the excitement that then prevailed was indescribable.

It was at that moment that the cart containing Sam Filcher, Beaufort and the driver, arrived at the scene, and made its way, regardless of the crowd, to an elevated spot of ground immediately opposite the scaffold.

"Vell," said Sam, "here ve air, anyhow, an' there's the door where he'll come out, an' there's the beam from which he'll have to dangle, poor fellow, an' there's the rope that—"

"Cease, brutal wretch, hardened miscreant, cease," interrupted Beaufort, worked up to a pitch of the most uncontrollable horror and excitement, "dare you with the gallows before you, and the certainty of the frightful doom which is your due, and which you know not how soon awaits you, thus indulge your fiendish appetite?"

"Hold hard," returned Filcher, with a look which made Beaufort tremble, "for it might happen if yer continny to go on at that rate, I might say a vord or two, not in a whisper nayther, vich 'ud not be hexactly pleasant to yer, I dare say."

Beaufort drew himself back in the cart, and fairly groaned again in the intensity of his anguish and terror. Sam Filcher looked upon him for a moment with the most supreme contempt, and then directed his whole attention to the scaffold.

"Ve've got a capital place," he remarked, "and shall have a fust rate view. Vot a preshuv vvhile it is afore that hand moves to the time. There's the bell ag'in, an' there's twelve of 'em. Now for it. Keep them here blessed hogles of yourn hopen, captain, an' yer shall see vot yer shall see."

Twelve o'clock, solemnly, dismally it pealed forth, and ere its last tone had died away, and amidst disgusting cries of "hats off," intermingled with oaths, the sheriffs and

the executioner made their appearance on the scaffold, and were quickly followed by the chaplain, reading the burial service in solemn monotonous tones, and the doomed man, with tottering steps, and face upturned towards the black sky which seemed to frown despair upon him.

The excitement of the crowd was now at fever heat, and the buzz of human voices became bewildering, but not one among that gaping multitude was half so painfully excited as Beaufort, who fixed his eyes appalled upon the wretched man about to suffer, though he was unable at first to obtain a distinct view of his features, but his form was strangely familiar to him.

"That's him," said Sam Filcher, grasping Beaufort by the arm; "don't yer recollect him, captain? He don't look keвите so fresh and vell as he used to do, an' he seems rayther down upon his luck, poor feller. Keep yer pluck up, Bob," shouted the brutal ruffian, "it'll soon be all over."

Bob!—that name fell upon the ears of Beaufort with electrical and paralysing effect—an exclamation of horror escaped his lips when he caught a distinct view of the culprit's ghastly features, as the executioner proceeded to perform his revolting office, and he trembled convulsively.

It was the unfortunate though guilty Jarvey Bob, before introduced to the reader, who having found it prudent to retreat from London, was guilty of the double crimes of robbery and murder, and being apprehended, was convicted on his trial, on the most indisputable evidence, and consequently sentenced to the dreadful death he was now about to suffer.

Nothing could be more awful than his appearance at that moment; the terror of death was fully and frightfully depicted in his livid countenance, his glassy eyes, his quivering limbs and clenched hands. But an instant he cast a despairing look upon the gaping crowd—it was his last; the executioner having adjusted the fatal halter, drew the cap over his face, and the drop fell; there was a convulsive heaving of the chest, the legs were drawn up in agony, a spasmodic movement and raising of the hands, and the world had closed on the poor guilty wretch for ever.

The hangman had taught the lesson of the gallows, and no doubt with excellent moral effect, if so it might be judged from the conduct of the sight-seers. There was a momentary thrill of horror ran through a small portion of the vast and motley assemblage, a woman or two fainted—whether from excitement caused by the dreadful spectacle they had just witnessed, or the pressure of the crowd we cannot undertake to say—fellows with stentorian lungs bawled "the last

dying speech and confeshun; life, k'racter and dying behaviour of the poor infortunate mallyfactor vot vos hexicated this morning, &c.," reported and printed the day before, a little urchin or two were trampled under foot—several others were detected in the act of picking pockets, there were two or three spirited pugilistic encounters; oaths, and disgusting jokes were bandied freely about, and there was the lifeless body of a fellow creature swinging in the air before their eyes, where it would remain for one hour for their especial enjoyment.

Happy sight-seers, to have so rich a treat provided for ye.

"Vell," observed Sam Filcher, sentimentally, "so there's a end of poor Jarvey Bob. Who'd ha thought he'd ha' been sich a flat as to step out of his line, an' venture his hand in a b'sness he vosn't cut out for, an' which he know'd nuffin about? He vos hambishus, he vos, an yer see the konsikens. Vell its a very great consolation to think as how he died so easy."

"Heartless, reckless, hardened villain," exclaimed the disgusted and horrorstruck Beaufort, again unable to control the excitement, or to suppress the expression of his feelings, "you have gratified your inhuman taste, and you have succeeded in torturing me to madness; surely you must be satisfied now. Let us begone."

"All in good time, captain," returned Sam, coolly, "don't be in sich a hurry, an' in sich a passion. Ve ought to see the end of poor Bob, an' he ain't cut down yet."

"Miscreant!—I will no longer remain, let the consequences be whatever they may," exclaimed Beaufort, jumping from the cart before Sam could attempt to prevent him, and endeavouring to force his way through the crowd from the spot.

"Hallo! damn yer stop!" shouted Sam, as he sprang from the cart, and following him, grasped him fiercely by the collar, much to the astonishment and curiosity of the bystanders, "yer infernal cur, I say, or yer'll stand a very good chance to be the next to dangle from that here beam. So you thought to step it, did yer? Guv me the double, eh? Valke!—I s'pects yer too much to let yer do that here. I tells yer, ve'll not niver part, captain, no not niver—ve'll live an die together."

"Mercy, Filcher, mercy," implored the agonised Beaufort, still more terrified at his threats, and the attention they were exciting among many of the crowd who seemed to eye them with looks of suspicion.

"Mercy be damned!" returned the brutal ruffian, still holding him by the collar, and looking at him menacingly; "ye're a drivellin' snivellin' fool, that's vot yer air, and if poor Bob could only look from hunder

that here night-cap at yer, bless'd if he wouldn't blush for yer. But kim along vith yer, it's no use a standin' patterin' here, I see. Good bye, Bob."

With this touching and feeling farewell, the amiable Sam Filcher elbowed his way with Beaufort, through the crowd, and turning a corner they lost sight of the prison.

All this had been quite a mystery to Roger Rumble, a mystery which he found it impossible to penetrate, but he had a vague notion that Sam and Beaufort were no better than they ought to be, and although he was not over particular himself, he was not at all sorry when the two worthies quitted his cart.

The hour for the ghastly exhibition elapsed, the body was cut down, the crowd began slowly to disperse, only a few remaining behind to have a last longing look at the gallows, and thus ended the hangman's moral lesson.

CHAPTER CV.

THE PROGRESS OF SAM AND BEAUFORT.

And now, immediately after the frightful scene we have faintly described in the foregoing pages, the dark clouds which had before obscured the horizon dispersed, and the golden monarch of the day broke forth in full splendour, as if it had before refused to shine upon the legal crime which had just been perpetrated in the presence of a brutally ignorant multitude, who as soon as the sight was over departed from the gallows to get drunk at the various taverns.

Sam, much to the relief of his wretched, and conscience stricken companion, avoided the city, and striking into the fields as speedily as possible, hurried on, forcing Beaufort along with him in no very friendly or gentle manner, and fixing upon him anything but agreeable looks.

"Vell, airyer satisfied now?" he demanded, when they had got to some distance from the place of execution.

Beaufort looked at him earnestly, and in a supplicating manner, but returned no answer.

"Now," continued Filcher, after a brief pause, and with a look of the most ineffable contempt, "don't yer think as how ye're a pretty, cowardly, damned 'umbug, eh?"

This was rather complimentary, certainly, but Beaufort did not seem to appreciate it duly, or if he did, he did not deem it prudent to reply to it, and Sam went on:—

"Don't yer think that yer deservs to be kick'd, or whipped at a cart's-tail or to stan' in the pillory, or to be dragged through a horse pond? Don't yer, yer warmint, eh?"

Neither of these suggestions met with the decided approbation of Beaufort, so he still remained silent, although he winced under the coarse rebukes and abuse of Filcher, and never had he felt his degraded position more keenly.

"Vell, if yer arn't ashamed of yourself I is," resumed Filcher, "for sich a rare spicimint of a rank out an' out mongrel, I never seed afore. Vy I 'spose if yer vos to see a dog hangin' it would frighten yer into fits, an' how vill it be then when it comes to yer own turn, vvhich in course it vill do von of these here blessed fine morning's?"

"Spare me, Sam, I beseech you spare me!" said the distracted Beaufort, in tones of the most earnest supplication.

"Spare yer!" repeated the villain, disdainfully; "ha! ha! ha! vot the devil should I spare yer for? Did ever any von see sich a trembling thing to call himself a man? Bah! I despises yer."

"Why then not suffer me to leave you?"

"I'd sooner blow yer brains out, that here is, if yer should 'appen to have any left, vvhich I doesn't much think yer have."

"What is it you would have of me?" eagerly interrogated Beaufort.

"Vot, vhy hact like a man, an' a pluck'd von, too, an' do as I tell yer. An' hark yer, yer must do so, an' I must hav' no more of this here damned nonsense, or yer'll have good cause to repent it, jist put that here in yer pipe an' smoke it, vill yer? An' remember that oud Sam Filcher's not to be caught snoozin', an' that he's a man of his vord."

Beaufort groaned.

"Oh, Filcher," he said, "why will you persist in taking such a fiendish delight in torturing me? What motive could you have in dragging me to the dreadful scene we have just witnessed? And why conceal from me the name of the wretched man who was about to suffer?"

"Vhy," replied the ruffian, "it vos rayther a funny whim of mine, to be sure; but it's a vay I've got, an' I can't help it, I vos larnt so, I s'pose. Asides, didn't I tell yer as how I meant to guv yer a agreeabel surprise? An' didn't I do so, yer hungreateful feller?"

"Sam, you have driven me half mad."

"Vot a pity. I'm sorry for that here. But yer ain't keville raving, yet, air yer?"

"You mock me."

"Vot else do yer desearve."

"Oh, Filcher, surely you cannot be so entirely destitute of every feeling of humanity. The ghastly looks of our former associate in crime, when he came upon the scaffold, and his dying agonies will never more be absent from my appalled sight, and the blood freezes in my veins with horror at the recollection of them."

"Psha! how the devil would yer have a feller die, I should like to know? For my own part I thought as how he stepp'd it very kevvietly; and I only hopes as how I may snuff it as comfortably, when it comes to my turn. Poor Jarvey Bob, he vill never remove any more svag. Many's the job he and I have had together, and many a glorious lush ve have had, niver, niver to have more, no, not niver. Ah, it is wery molloncholy to think on."

The tender-hearted Mr. Sam Filcher was almost overpowered by his feelings as these dismal thoughts arose to his mind, and he sighed deeply.

"Ah, vell," he said, after awhile, "it can't be helped, so vot is the use of grieving? Now then, captain, have yer recovered yer self yet?"

Beaufort could not answer, he was so thoroughly disgusted with the brutal observations Sam made use of.

"Still funkng," said Sam, "bless'd if ever I seed sich a feller, in' my life. There is no getting yer to keep yer pecker hup, not no how. But I knows vot's good for yer complaint; so step out—kim along, an' the first crib ve meets vith, vell have a drop or two of summat to drink on the strength of this here b'sness, vvhich'll do us good an' 'wigoate our spirits."

Beaufort had nothing to say against this, for he really felt, after the terror and excitement he had undergone, to require some refreshment.

They therefore quickened their speed, making their way to the nearest town or village they might meet with.

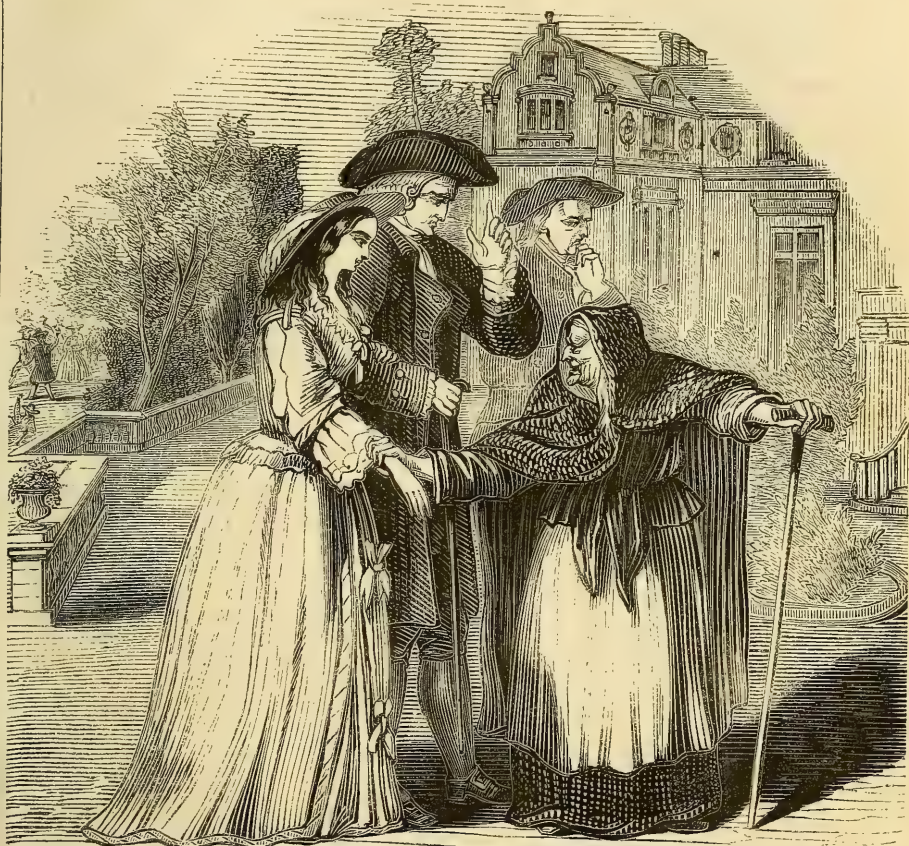
And as they proceeded Beaufort resigned himself to the most torturing and dismal reflections, and every moment did his fears and his agitation increase.

The frightful scene he had so lately witnessed was again presented to his imagination, and again he beheld the ghastly, livid features and despairing looks of the wretched criminal, and saw his dreadful dying agonies. And to add to the horror and anguish of his feelings, the strange and prophetic words of Zara, the gipsy girl, recurred most forcibly to his memory.

And then the fear he entertained of his hardened associate in guilt, Sam Filcher, was increased tenfold by his recent brutal conduct, and the threats he had held out, and he could not even look upon him without a shudder of horror.

Sam, however, did not appear to take much notice of him, or if he did it was only to exult at the misery he knew he was enduring.

They continued to walk for some time, without meeting with the place they wanted, and Filcher's patience began to get exhausted.



"Vhy the devil don't they have more houses of 'commodashun for gemmen like ourselves, in this here part of the country?" he said; "if they'd got any feelings of humanity about 'em they would. If I don't get a rewiver afore long I shall swoon to a certainty. I vish ve'd only gone into the city arter poor Bob vos topp'd, an' ve should have been as right as a trevit in no time."

"Yes," remarked Beaufort, who was making a strong effort to recover himself, and to shake of the cowardly fears that had so long beset him, "and perhaps we should not have found ourselves quite as right as a trevit, as you call it, but accommodated in a manner that would not be exactly agreeable to either of us, namely, in the cell of a prison."

"Ye're allus fearin' of summat," returned Sam, "a guilty conscience I s'pose, which

never troubles me, that's von comfort. Ve've nuffin to fear in this here disguise, if yer fears doesn't blow the gaff; so yer'd better mind what ye're about."

"It is your fool-hardiness that is more likely to betray us," said Beaufort, "your rash conduct has already frequently placed us in the greatest danger. What right had we, if we studied our own safety, to have ventured to be present at the frightful and revolting scene we have just witnessed, and which I would rather have lost a fortune, if I had one, than have seen? I fancied that I saw the eyes of several of the persons fixed narrowly upon our features, as though they had some suspicion of our real characters, even if they did not know who we really are."

"Ye're allus a fancyin' of summat, cos ye're a fool," returned Sam Filcher, in his

usual bland and flattering strain, "an' nuffin not never comes on it. But enuff of that here; I sees smoke above the trees yonder, so ve're not far hoff some town or willage, that here's kevite sartin; so our vants vill soon be relieved, I dare say, that is if ve air only lucky."

Sam was right, for after proceeding for about five minutes in the direction from which they noticed the curling smoke evidently from chimney-pots, and making their way in between them, they came in sight of a rural village, and at the entrance of which was a quiet, homely-looking hostelry, and which seemed to invite the traveller to rest and refreshment.

"Lucky at last, by Jewpeter!" exclaimed the delighted Sam Filcher, "ve shall be all right here I can see. Now, captain, jist yer please to brighten hup that here gloomy mug of your'n, vill yer, an' put on yer best manners, else yer an' I might chance to tumble out."

Beaufort made no promise; he did not even condescend an answer of any description, and they walked towards the inn.

CHAPTER CVI.

A VISIT TO THE COTTAGE OF DAME MALVERN.

As may be expected, the alarming adventure of our heroine and Amy Ashford with the villains Filcher and Beaufort, as related in a previous chapter, caused them considerable excitement, and it was some time ere they could recover themselves from the feelings of disgust and indignation which the daring and insolent conduct of the ruffians on that occasion had naturally created in their bosoms.

Henry felt astonished, after the crimes they had committed, and the indefatigable exertions of the officers of justice—but in vain—for so long a time to discover them, that they should have ventured to enter a neighbourhood where they were known so well, and he could only imagine that it must have been some very powerful motive that could have induced them to do so, and he at once saw the necessity of being on his guard in case of some threatened danger.

In the first place, he thought it prudent to make the magistrates acquainted with all the particulars, so that they might issue such instructions as might lead to the apprehension of the villains, and be the means of bringing them at last to that punishment which they so richly merited, but had so long escaped.

Several days elapsed after this event without anything more occurring to excite the

alarm or uneasiness of the inmates of the farm; their principal anxiety being of course for poor old Mark Mayfield, who continued in much the same state, the physicians who attended him being unable to hold out to our heroine or her friends any very flattering hopes of his ultimate recovery. In fact from the time which had elapsed, and the settled form which his unfortunate malady had assumed, such an event appeared to be highly improbable.

Our heroine endeavoured to resign herself to the will of heaven, and to bear this trying misfortune with all the fortitude she could, although she had a most difficult task to accomplish to do so.

While Henry was busily occupied at the farm, which prospered daily, Phoebe and Amy frequently paid a visit to the once happy cottage in which the former was born, and which was so closely associated with all her joys and sorrows, and in the conversation old Dame Malvern, the present occupier of it, they passed many a pleasant hour.

Dame Malvern was a most intelligent and amiable woman, and had evidently seen far more prosperous and happy days than those which she now enjoyed, although they, as she said, "thanks to Squire Stubbles and good Master Ashford, who saw that she did not want for anything, were far happier than she had a right to expect."

The old woman had also experienced her share of sorrow, to which she frequently alluded in the course of the different conversations she at times held with our heroine and Amy, and they had often felt a curiosity to be made acquainted with the particulars of her history; and one day when she appeared disposed to be more communicative than usual they warmly urged their request.

"Alas, my dear children," said the dame, "the tale I have to relate is one indeed replete with some of the most extraordinary and romantic events that perhaps were ever recorded. But at the same time it is a dismal history, a tale of domestic sorrows, and heart-rending suffering, and I fear it is but ill calculated to interest you."

Our heroine and her companion assured her to the contrary, and of their anxiety to hear it, if it would not be intruding too much upon her to relate it, and the old woman then observed—

"It is a long story, and relates more to the misfortunes of my poor mother than myself, and I'm fearful that I shall tire your patience before I arrive at the conclusion of it. I am now a very aged woman, nearly eighty winters have rolled over my head, and more than seventy years have elapsed since the principal events that I am about to relate occurred, and most of which were told me by my mother; but they live in my memory,

and must continue to do so till the grave shall close over my remains."

The curiosity of Phoebe and Amy was more than ever excited by the observations of Dame Malvern, and they listened attentively to the commencement of her narrative, which, however, we shall take the liberty of relating in our own language.

DAME MALVERN'S TALE.

Reader, be pleased to imagine one of the most beautiful localities in a rural district of the North of England, with a pretty village surrounded by romantic scenery; an old water-mill, the ruins of an old abbey at a short distance, green pastures with sheep, horses, and oxen grazing thereon, ripening corn-fields, a peaceful valley, a flowing streamlet, with lofty hills in the back-ground, whose summits seemed lost in the clouds.

Then picture to yourself a stately mansion, which seemed to have been built, to judge from the style of the architecture, in the early part of the reign of good Queen Bess, with a pleasant green lawn before it, and backed by an extensive park; a bright sun, and a clear blue sky, on a lovely day in the month of June about the year 1750, and the picture we wish you to conceive will be almost complete.

All was life, and bustle, and gait, and activity in the village, and particularly in and about the above-mentioned old mansion—strains of music were heard, merry peals of laughter resounded on every side; rustic swains, and pretty village maidens, all attired in their holiday gear, flocked to the green lawn in front of the mansion, their eyes sparkling with delight, and their hearts fluttering with expectation, and everything betokened a happy day of revelry and innocent enjoyment.

But what did all these joyous notes of preparation at Hawthorn Hall—so was the old mansion called—and in the surrounding neighbourhood mean? Why did every countenance glow with pleasure? Why was every heart so light and cheerful? Why did expectation sit on every brow? Why was the ancient hall so gaily decorated—why were the tables spread?—why was old Andrew Muddleton the faithful steward in a perfect fever of excitement? and why was every domestic in the hospitable mansion in a similar state, bustling here, bustling there?"

Reader, hear the simple fact. It was the natal day of the beauteous Fanny Hawthorn, the only daughter of the good Squire of Hawthorn Hall, honoured, revered by all who knew him, for his virtues were innumerable, his urbanity unsurpassed, his benevolence unbounded.

To his equals in station, Squire Hawthorn

was a warm, an ardent, a sincere friend, and a jovial, kind-hearted companion, to his tenants and dependents a generous landlord and a kind master, plain spoken, unostentatious, in fact, to sum up his character in a few words, Squire Hawthorn was one of the finest specimens of a good old country gentleman, and he was looked upon with the highest esteem and admiration by all who came within the circle of his acquaintance.

On this auspicious occasion the good squire had determined that there should not be a sad heart, or an empty belly if he could help it, in the neighbourhood, and with that view he had

"Open'd gates to all,"

and young and old, rich and poor, were alike invited to partake of the feast, to join in the sprightly dance, and share the sports and festivities he had so liberally provided for their enjoyment.

The humbler portion of the guests were assembled in numbers at an early hour, and every countenance showed a happy determination to do full justice to the festivities of the day, and as old Andrew Muddleton—who had been appointed master of the ceremonies—bustled among them and gave them particular advice as to the manner in which they should comport themselves, they made the air resound again with their shouts of merriment and applause.

"Ah, be merry, friends, be merry," said the old man, "let your hearts be light with joy, and your toes be light in the sprightly dance that we shall have anon. Pleasure is the order of the day on this auspicious occasion, the natal day of the good old squire's, my honoured master's, daughter, the lovely and gentle Fanny Hawthorn, God bless her!"

This was received with deafening cheers, and the steward went on to say—

"Aye, my friends, you may well hail with feelings of pleasure and respect the name of our dear young lady, for she sheds happiness and pleasure on all around her. Who loves everybody, while everybody loves her?"

"Fanny Hawthorn!" shouted the rustics in a breath.

"Who is the most amiable, the most gentle, the most generous young lady in all the county?"

"Fanny Hawthorn," was again the unanimous reply.

"Who soothes the afflicted, watches by the sufferer in the time of sickness, and is ever ready to relieve the wants and see to the comfort of her humble fellow creatures?"

"Fanny Hawthorn."

"True true; but we must not forget my honoured master, Squire Hawthorn. Who then, I ask ye, is the friend of the friendless, the father of the fatherless, and who

is all that is truly benevolent and philanthropic?"

"Squire Hawthorn!" shouted the rustics.

"Who feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, and is the warm friend of honest and virtuous poverty, wherever he finds it?"

"Squire Hawthorn!"

"True, true," said Andrew, highly pleased to find everybody of his opinion; then raise your voices, my friends, and let them be the echoes of your hearts; shout long life and happiness to Squire Hawthorn of Hawthorn Hall, and his amiable daughter, Fanny Hawthorn, the flower of the county."

The humble and happy guests needed no second invitation to do this, and again their honest and hearty cheers rent the air.

They now retired to amuse themselves in various parts of the grounds attached to the mansion, while the steward occupied himself in completing some little preparations for the festivities.

At that moment a certain individual—an elderly man with a sinister look, and who gloried in the name of Mr. Jonas Chizzleton—made his appearance,

He was accompanied by an eccentric, meagre-looking man, about his own age, and with a still more forbidding expression of features if possible than those of the person just described, whose confidential servant he was, Mr. Samuel Snarley by name.

But of these two worthies, more anon.

"You heard the fulsome praise that old fawning hypocrite uttered just now, Snarley?" said Mr. Jonas Chizzleton; "was it not disgusting?"

"Horrible, my dear master," replied his servant, "oh, the hypocrisy of the world."

"Bah!"

"Such extravagant praise of those who so ill merit it," Snarley went on to say, "I maintain is awful, my dear master. As for Squire Hawthorn and his daughter—"

"I have laid a snare for them," interrupted his worthy master, "which they cannot escape. I have sworn to accomplish my designs at all hazards, and Jonas Chizzleton will keep his word, depend on it."

"I admire your spirit and determination, sir," remarked Snarley, "and you know you may command my best assistance in the forwarding of your praiseworthy designs."

"You are a crafty, time-serving knave, Snarley," said Jonas, "an adept in every species of vice; a consummate scoundrel, a perfect paragon of villany, and therefore do I esteem you."

Mr. Samuel Snarley bowed to the very points of his toes, as he replied—

"Oh, my good, kind master, how you flatter me, indeed you do. But if I really possess the amiable qualities you have described, they are but faint reflections of

yourself. It has ever been my pride, my ambition to emulate your virtues, and—"

"Enough," interrupted Chizzleton, impatiently, "we understand each other. Silence, this old dotard has observed us."

Andrew Muddleton now came forward, and bowing obsequiously, said—

"Good morning to you, Mr. Jonas Chizzleton, and to you, my worthy Samuel Snarley. So then you have come to do honour to the birthday of our dear young lady?"

"Yes, honest Andrew," answered Jonas, "I feel a great pleasure in congratulating your young mistress, and her excellent father. But I have a little private business with Squire Hawthorn; can I see him?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Chizzleton," replied the steward; "a servant will conduct you to him immediately."

"I thank you," said Chizzleton, as he entered the hall; Snarley await my return here in a couple of hours."

Snarley bowed and retired.

"Like master, like man," muttered old Andrew to himself, when they were both gone. "There go two of the most arrant scoundrels, I believe, that ever disgraced society."

The humble guests now flocked around him, anxious to put several questions to him as to the programme of the amusements, and when they were likely to have the pleasure of seeing the squire and his daughter, all of which he satisfactorily answered.

"And now, my friends," he remarked, "you know I am to be grand master of the ceremonies; and I have my master's orders to see that you all enjoy yourselves to your heart's content on this joyous occasion."

"Hurrah!—bravo!—long live Squire Hawthorn and his beauteous daughter!" shouted the rustic guests.

"You are all," continued Andrew Muddleton "to have drink *ad libitum*, and roast beef and plum-pudding by the square foot."

"Hurrah—hurrah!"

"No man is to give in until he falls under the table, on pain of the squire's displeasure:"

"Bravo—bravo!"

"Every man, old or young, gentle or simple, is to crack his joke, sing his song, and join in the merry dance, while he has a leg to stand upon."

"Hurrah—capital!"

"And now, friends and neighbours," concluded the worthy old steward, "having made known to you the orders of the day, I as grand *major domo*, direct that the festivities shall commence with a dance."

"Bravo!" cried every one assembled on that occasion, in high glee, "a dance—a dance!"

And a dance they had, and a right merry dance, too, and in the midst of it, Squire

Hawthorn, with his daughter on his arm, and followed by Mr. Jonas Chizzleton—looking diabolically exultant—came forth from the hall, and were greeted with acclamations of delight and esteem, which both the squire and the fair, and blushing Fanny Hawthorn most graciously acknowledged.

"Thanks, my honest friends," said the squire, "for this cordial greeting. It gladdens me to see you all so happy on this auspicious occasion. I pray you do not suffer me or my daughter to be any restraint upon your pleasures. Enjoy yourselves, be merry, be wise, be happy, and God bless you all."

This speech drew forth a perfect hurricane of applause, and the rustics retired from the spot to enjoy their harmless revels.

The squire having whispered a word in his daughter's ear, kissed her affectionately, and she retired for a minute or two to a short distance, and left her father and Jonas Chizzleton together.

"Then everything, at least so far as the preliminaries are concerned, Mr. Chizzleton," remarked the squire, "is satisfactorily arranged?"

"Exactly so, Mr. Hawthorn," replied Jonas, "and it is a source of the highest pride and gratification to me, I assure you that it is so. No one can hold Squire Hawthorn in greater esteem than myself, or can possibly feel more anxious for the welfare and happiness of your lovely daughter."

"I fully appreciate your feelings, Mr. Chizzleton, and thank you sincerely for them sir," said the squire, who bowing to Jonas, rejoined his daughter.

"I triumph," muttered old Jonas to himself, in tones of satisfaction, and with looks which told the dark thoughts that were passing in his mind, the first step towards the accomplishment of my deep laid schemes is taken, and I will, I must succeed."

Squire Hawthorn with his daughter now again approached, and having invited Jonas to accompany them, they took their seats under the wide-spreading branches of a favourite old tree on one side of the lawn, and from whence they could obtain an excellent view of the sports of the rustic revellers.

Fanny Hawthorn had that day attained her seventeenth year, but in what language shall we seek to convey any idea of the transcendent beauty of her face and form? They were perfection itself, and it was impossible for any one, nay, even the most insensible to behold her with any other feelings than those of the warmest regard, and the most enthusiastic admiration. And her intrinsic qualities perfectly corresponded with her personal beauty, and won for her the love of all who knew her.

But on that day she wore an expression of

sadness which was quite strange to her, and seemed greatly out of place on that joyous and auspicious occasion, and it was evident that her mind was ill at ease.

Whenever Mr. Jonas Chizzleton addressed himself to her, which he frequently did, in tones of affability and gallantry which he knew well how to assume to suit his purpose, she shuddered with an involuntary feeling of terror which she could not conquer, and averted her looks, for she could not bear to gaze upon the forbidding countenance of the old man.

And now the festivity was at its height, and the scene was one that was sufficient to excite feelings of the most unbounded pleasure even in the dullest breast.

The numerous guests had feasted themselves on the ample fare so liberally provided for them by their hospitable host, to their heart's content, and had resumed their merry dance upon the green lawn, to the lively strains of music, provided expressly for the occasion; light feet tripped it gaily, every face was clothed in sunny smiles, and the frequent peals of laughter which burst forth from the rustic revellers showed the happiness which reigned within their breasts.

The good old squire, whose greatest delight was to contribute to and witness the happiness of other's it need scarcely be said fully enjoyed the cheerful scene, and his lovely daughter, notwithstanding the sad feeling to which we have before alluded, could not but participate in the general pleasure which prevailed.

Suddenly a wild, unnatural cry, however, resounded on the air, and the rustic dance immediately ceased, and all eyes were turned in the direction from which it proceeded.

"It is wandering Jenny," said Jonas, "what brings the old hag here to mar the pleasures of the day? It is a pity they do not confine her in some mad-house."

"Speak not so unkindly of poor wandering Jenny, Mr. Chizzleton," said Fanny, with a look of reproof, "for surely the unfortunate old woman is worthy of every sympathy."

"True, my love," coincided her father, "and she is as welcome here as any other of our guests."

"She is ever a bird of ill-omen," said Jonas, "but see, she comes."

The wild cry was repeated, and the next instant the singular being whom they called "wandering Jenny," stood in the midst of the merry throng, but with her eyes fixed steadfastly on Fanny, her father, and old Jonas.

She was apparently a very aged woman of the gipsy tribe, but who for some time past had taken up her residence in a wretched hovel, situated in a lonely spot, a short distance from the village, where she existed on

the charity of those who chose to assist her, in return for which she told fortunes, and the villagers and others placed no small faith in the truth of her predictions.

Her personal appearance was wretched enough, her form was bent nearly double with age, and was miserably clad in an old patched and ragged gown. Her features were dark, haggard, and shrivelled, and there was a wild and restless expression in her eyes, which were deeply set in their sockets, that were anything but pleasant to gaze upon.

For a minute or two she remained in the same fixed attitude among the revellers, but at length she slowly advanced towards the place where Fanny, her father, and Jonas were seated, and standing before them fixed her eyes earnestly upon them, but more particularly on Fanny, who could not help a feeling of uneasiness stealing over her as she met the glances of the mysterious old woman.

"Now, old woman," said the officious Mr. Jonas Chizzleton, in harsh and surly tones, "what brings you here to-day? To throw a blight upon the pleasures of those who have met here for enjoyment with your ridiculous fortune telling, as you call it, and to extort thereby the money from your silly dupes."

"Would Jonas Chizzleton have me give a faithful description of his character, one which he cannot deny the truth of?" said Jenny, at the same time fixing upon him a penetrating look; "would he have me reveal the thoughts which at this moment I know to be passing in his mind? But it were a waste of words just now to do so. Fanny Hawthorn would you know the good or evil fortune that awaits you? Wandering Jenny is here to tell you, and she will tell you truly.

"Psha!" again interrupted old Jonas, "begone, and keep your foolish prophecies for the vulgar and the credulous."

"Nay, sir," said Fanny, with a reproaching look, "be not angry with poor old Jenny, I am e'en inclined to humour her."

"Take then your whim, my dear," returned her father, smiling; "no doubt Jenny will astonish you with her marvels."

"Your hand, fair damsel," said the old woman.

Fanny extended it, and after looking at it earnestly for a minute or two, in solemn and impressive tones she said—

"Dark, dark and fearful is that which I can see written here. Alas, Fanny Hawthorn, you are reserved for a terrible fate."

Fanny started, but endeavoured to smile incredulously, but in vain.

"What mean you, strange woman?" she demanded, eagerly; "tell me—speak."

"Listen," replied Jenny, grasping the maiden rather roughly by the wrist; and

she then continued in still more solemn and impressive accents—

"Bright shines the sun on thy morn of life,
With flowers thy pathway now is rife;
But dark clouds will gather, and lour, and break,

And you from your dream of joy will awake.
You will wed, but oh, better by far you died,
Than live a wretched, heart-broken bride;
Degraded, exposed to scorn and shame,
For murder shall brand your husband's name!"

A cry of terror escaped the lips of Fanny as the last words were uttered by the mysterious woman, and she fainted in the arms of her father.

The utmost excitement now prevailed among the persons assembled, and for a time the revels ceased.

Wandering Jenny for a few moments fixed a look of mingled sorrow and regret upon the now pale features of the insensible girl, then turning from the spot, she hurried away through the gaping and half terrified guests assembled, and was out of sight in a few moments.

The squire, who was much alarmed, with assistance, immediately conveyed his beautiful daughter into the hall, and Mr. Jonas Chizzleton, on whom the words of the old woman whom he had affected so much to despise, had a marked and singular effect, probably thinking that his presence might be no longer welcome, quitted the place, and returned to the crazy, dingy old fashioned building in which he had for so many years resided.

CHAPTER CVII.

THE FORTUNES OF FANNY HAWTHORN.

It was indeed a strange and fearful prediction, and excited no little uneasiness in the minds of Fanny and her father, the latter of whom, however, affected to treat it with scorn, and endeavoured to remove the impression it had so painfully made upon his daughter, but in vain.

However, before we proceed further with our narrative, it is necessary that we should relate some particulars which it is important that the reader should know.

First then old Jonas Chizzleton.

From what he has already been informed, the reader has probably been able to form a pretty shrewd idea of the character of that worthy gentleman. Suffice it then to say that in him were combined some of the worst passions of human nature, and every one looked upon him with feelings of dislike and suspicion, except Squire Hawthorn, who respected everybody, and would have despised himself if he could possibly have

thought uncharitably of any of his fellow creatures.

Jonas Chizzleton was crafty, sordid, and avaricious, and would stop at nothing to gratify his evil passions, even though he had to wade through an ocean of crime to gain his ends. Most inveterate was his hatred against any one who had incurred his displeasure, and he lost no opportunity of revenge. He was supposed to be very rich, though it was not his benevolence which gained him that repute, for he had never been known to give a farthing in charity in his life, and his personal appearance was rather calculated to give a flat denial to the report, he having worn the same suit of clothes for years.

The house in which Jonas Chizzleton resided corresponded with the character of the man. It was a gloomy, mis-shapen, tottering old building, with dirty broken windows and heavy oaken doors, which seemed to frown upon every one who approached.

The only servants he kept were the amiable Mr. Samuel Snarley, who has been already introduced to the reader, and "Mother Snigs," as Jonas familiarly called her, and who acted in the capacity of his house-keeper, and was about as dirty in her habits and appearance, as she was malicious, surly, and disagreeable in her disposition.

But old Jonas Chizzleton had a nephew, one Martin Bayford, who had been brought up under his auspices, and of whom we shall have occasion to speak more particularly presently.

Although old Jonas had managed to insinuate himself into the good graces of the easy and unsuspecting Squire Hawthorn, and pretended for him the warmest friendship, in his heart he felt for him the most bitter hatred, and only waited an opportunity of gratifying the malicious and revengeful feelings he had long nurtured towards him.

The cause of this was as follows—

The late Mrs. Hawthorn, who, in her younger days, was a most amiable and beautiful woman, before she became the wife of the squire, had excited a passion in the breast of Jonas Chizzleton, and he paid her much attention, and ultimately confessed the sentiments with which she had inspired him, no doubt, in his vanity, expecting an easy conquest.

He was doomed, however, to be most woefully disappointed. He was scornfully rejected, and quitted the presence of the lady, foaming with rage, and vowing revenge.

His rage and deadly malice were soon afterwards greatly increased by seeing Hawthorn—whom he had long viewed with feelings of dislike and envy, in consequence of his amiable qualities—lead the lady to the altar, and from that moment his animosity

towards that gentleman daily increased, and did not subside even after the death of his wife, which melancholy event took place after they had only been married five years.

Martin Bayford, the nephew of Jonas, was the only son of his sister, who died in his infancy, leaving her child to the care of her mercenary brother, with a sum sufficient to bring him up and educate him as a gentleman, and it must be confessed that in this instance the old man faithfully discharged his duty, for Martin was the only being for whom he had ever felt the least regard.

From an early age he endeavoured to instill into the mind of his nephew all the amiable qualities which he himself possessed, and to a certain extent he greatly succeeded, for the youth evinced all that craftiness, sordidness, and vindictiveness of disposition, for which his aged relative was so highly distinguished, and increasing years promised to improve him.

The beauty of Fanny Hawthorn had at an early age excited an ardent passion in the breast of Martin Bayford, in which his uncle gladly encouraged him, hoping by that means to be able to accomplish his long cherished designs of revenge against Hawthorn.

Martin Bayford possessed great plausibility of manners, and an insinuating address, together with a handsome person, and he therefore managed to win the confidence and esteem of Fanny and her father; although the maiden could feel for him no warmer sentiment, for her heart was already another's. When Martin, therefore, confessed his love, and implored her to return it, she held out to him not the least shadow of a hope, and requested him to discontinue his visits to the hall, until he should have been enabled to conquer his unfortunate passion.

This was a terrible disappointment to Martin, and a blow to his vanity which he could not easily forgive; and although to Fanny he appeared to submit patiently to her will, he resolved to persist in his efforts to obtain her hand, and consequently, at probably no distant period, the property of her father, which he coveted still more.

It need scarcely be added that Jonas Chizzleton encouraged him in those designs, and he had no doubt that they would ultimately succeed in accomplishing them, the more especially as Mr. Hawthorn looked upon the suit of Martin with a favourable eye, although he loved his beautiful daughter too fondly to seek to bias or control her inclinations.

In this state of matters, Martin being well supplied with money by his uncle, departed on the Continent, Jonas promising during his absence to use all his endeavours for the furtherance of their designs.

The object of the beautiful Fanny Hawthorn's affections was a young man of the name of Valentine Wilden, whose numerous excellent qualities shone forth conspicuously in all his actions, and had won for him the esteem of all who knew him. But the prospects of Valentine, so far as regarded money matters, were not very bright or cheerful, he being entirely dependent on a relation of limited fortune, with whom he resided, and therefore, although his very soul was fixed on Fanny, he dared not, at present at any rate, aspire to her hand, thinking that it was not at all likely her father would give his consent to their union, notwithstanding he ever received him as a welcome guest at the hall, and treated him with the utmost kindness and respect.

Through the influence of some friends—Valentine having always had a predilection for the sea—after bidding an affectionate farewell to Fanny, and vowing eternal constancy, even should they never meet again, he departed from old England on his first voyage as midshipman, and for some time Fanny was completely inconsolable, and absence did but serve to increase the love she felt for him. But a terrible shock was in store for her. The melancholy news reached England of the destruction of the vessel in which her lover had sailed, by fire, and it was believed that every soul on board had perished.

We need not, we are sure, attempt to describe the bitter anguish of poor Fanny Hawthorn on the receipt of this dreadful intelligence, and of the but too probable shocking and untimely fate of the unfortunate Valentine Wilden, to whom her heart was so fondly devoted, and on whom her hopes—in spite of the numerous obstacles which presented themselves to the gratification of their wishes—were fixed. The shock was too much for her, and for some time she remained in a state bordering upon madness, much to the grief and alarm of her father, who regretted the untimely death of Valentine Wilden, fearing that by it his daughter's peace of mind would be destroyed for ever.

Time, however, served to ameliorate the violence of her grief, and she became calm and resigned, although he for whom she so sincerely mourned, was never for a moment absent from her memory.

A twelvemonth passed away, during which period old Jonas Chizzleton was almost a daily visitor at Hawthorn Hall, and took every opportunity of introducing the name of his nephew, lauding him to the skies, and speaking of the sentiments he so fervently entertained towards Fanny, and the hope which he expressed in all his letters, that he might be permitted to renew his addresses on his return to England.

The worthy squire lent a favourable ear to all this, but the reader may imagine the dread and repugnance with which Fanny listened to it, for although, as has been before stated, she held Martin Bayford in the highest esteem, believing him to possess many noble and virtuous qualities, she could not think of him in the character of her husband without a certain feeling amounting to almost one of dread; and yet should it be her father's wish that she should give encouragement to Martin's addresses, she dare not act in disobedience to his will.

This subject cost her many hours of torturing reflection, and she could not look forward to the return of Martin Bayford to England without a feeling of dread, which she found it impossible to conquer, notwithstanding she reproached herself as ungenerous for entertaining it.

And thus matters stood up to the day of festivities at Hawthorn Hall, and which had been so strangely and unpleasantly interrupted by the mysterious old woman, Wandering Jenny, and now having fully given those necessary explanations, we will resume the thread of our story.

CHAPTER CVIII.

THE SECRET ASSASSIN.

Fanny Hawthorn was soon restored to sensibility, but such was the painful impression which the awful prediction of Wandering Jenny had made upon her mind, that she could not easily recover from it, and all the efforts of her father failed, at present, at any rate, to revive her spirits.

Much to the regret and disappointment of every one, the festivities, although allowed to proceed, were no longer honoured by the presence of the squire and his daughter, and they consequently passed off without that *eclat* that they otherwise would have done, and terminated at a much earlier hour than had been intended.

As the crafty and designing Mr. Jonas Chizzleton proceeded from Hawthorn Hall to his own gloomy dwelling, he gave free indulgence to the nefarious thoughts that occupied his mind, and exulted at the prospect of his wishes being in a fair way of gratification.

The observations and remarkable prophecy of old wandering Jenny, had excited some thoughts and feelings of an unpleasant description in his breast, but he quickly dismissed them, and resumed the train of his other far more gratifying reflections, which he continued till he arrived at his house, where he found the amiable and faithful Mr. Samuel Snarley anxiously awaiting his return.



"My honoured master," said the obsequious creature, with a profound bow, and distorting his ugly features into what he meant to be a bland smile, "you have then returned, punctual to the moment, too; need I say how impatiently I have been waiting for you, and—"

"Bah!" interrupted Chizzleton, surlily; "has anybody called?"

"No, my revered master," replied Snarley.

"Humph," said Chizzleton. "Snarley."

"Yes, sir."

"I am your friend, eh?"

"My best, my only earthly friend," answered Snarley, fawningly.

"You are my steward?"

"Thanks to your kindness, good Mr. Chizzleton."

"I pay you liberally."

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"Munificently, my dear master."

"You admire me for my villany, Snarley?"

"I could worship you for it, excellent Mr. Chizzleton."

"Then you will rejoice to hear that my designs proceed towards accomplishment much better even than I anticipated."

"I am delighted, good master."

"Yes," said Chizzleton, "an agreement which old Hawthorn signed this day, binds him to my will, compels his daughter to accept of Martin's hand, and will ultimately, unless I am much mistaken, leave the disposal of the squire's large wealth between Martin and myself."

"Capital—excellent!" exclaimed Snarley, in perfect ecstasies; "oh, how I admire your wisdom, skill, and ingenuity, my beloved master. May providence shower down every

blessing upon your head, and all your praiseworthy and virtuous efforts be crowned with complete success."

"They must be so."

"I trust they will."

"They shall."

"Yes, they shall, honoured sir."

"Leave me."

"Yes, sir. When shall attend you again, sir?"

"When I send for you."

"Very good."

"There—there, go."

"I obey."

Snarley fixed one more look of admiration and reverence upon his amiable master, and then slowly quitted the room, and Mr. Chizzleton locked the door, to prevent any further intrusion, and soon became immersed in his guilty thoughts to the enjoyment of which we will for the present leave him, and return to Mr. Hawthorn and his amiable daughter.

The day following the festival at the hall Fanny was seated in her apartment, deeply wrapped in gloomy meditation upon the extraordinary adventure with Wandering Jenny, and giving way to the most dismal forebodings as to the future which awaited her, when she was interrupted by a gentle knock at the door, and before she could rise to open it, her father entered the room.

He advanced towards her with his usual looks of affection, and having kissed and embraced her, he looked anxiously in her face, and then in tones of regret, said—

"How sad are your looks, my child. Tell me how is this?"

"Alas, my father," replied Fanny, "do not chide me for that I am about to say, but dismal forebodings haunt and disturb my mind, which I cannot, though fain I would resist."

"Forebodings, Fanny?"

"Yes, my father; the fearful prophecy of old wandering Jenny yesterday, and—"

"Come, come, Fanny," interrupted her father, impatiently, "you must not suffer the silly predictions of a half crazy old woman, to disturb you thus."

"And yet," said Fanny, "were they not, and the manner in which she spoke them most solemn and impressive? In vain I seek to banish them from my memory. They still seem to ring in mine ears, and make me shudder with a nameless feeling of horror."

"Nay, my child," remonstrated Mr. Hawthorn, in gentle accents, "this is the weakness of superstition, and I am surprised to find you give way to it. But you must endeavour to arouse yourself from it, Fanny, and to dismiss such gloomy thoughts from your mind. I have good news for you, which I should have communicated to you yester-

day, had it not been for the unpleasant adventure which so annoyed us."

"Good news, my father?" repeated Fanny eagerly.

"Yes, my excellent friend, Mr. Chizzleton—"

"Mr. Chizzleton," interrupted Fanny, in a faltering voice.

"Yes, Mr. Chizzleton; but why do you look so agitated at the mention of that gentleman's name?"

"I—I, my father," returned Fanny, confused, "no, no—I—you are mistaken, I only—but pray proceed with what you were about to say."

"Well then," continued her father, Mr. Chizzleton informed me yesterday that he expects his nephew, Martin Bayford, in England every day, and I need not add that Hawthorn Hall will be the first place that he will visit, and Fanny Hawthorn the principal magnet which will attract him there. He is a noble young fellow, no doubt time too has worked a great improvement in him, and—but bless me, child, how pale you look, and you tremble; what is the meaning of this, Fanny?"

"Martin Bayford," faintly returned Fanny, but she was unable to finish the sentence.

"Well, he is a worthy young man, is he not?"

"Yes, yes—I believe him to be so, and—"

"He loves you, fervently, sincerely—and you feel for him—"

"The greatest esteem, my father, but—"

"Esteem," repeated the old gentleman, rather impatiently, "gadzoos, Fanny, I do not like that word, which although very well in its place is too cold to express the sentiments I wish you to entertain for Martin Bayford. But I see how it is, poor Valentine Wilden still occupies your memory."

Fanny burst into tears, and could not reply. Her father took her hand, and looking tenderly and commiseratingly in her face, he said—

"My dear Fanny, I sought not to wound your feeling, for who can be so anxious for your welfare and happiness as myself? Unfortunate Valentine, I esteemed him for his manly virtues, I am convinced that you loved each other sincerely, and had it pleased the Almighty that he should have lived to return to his native land, and his sentiments had remained the same, believe me, Fanny, that your father would have been no obstacle to your union to one who he thought would make you happy. But it was otherwise ordained; and therefore am I anxious before I die to see you the wife of a man who is worthy of you. Such do I believe Martin Bayford to be, and therefore do I trust that you will become his wife, and that every blessing may attend you."

Fanny threw herself sobbing in her father's arms, and for a few minutes her emotions were too powerful to allow her to give utterance to a syllable.

"Spare me, my dear father," she at length ejaculated, "for the present I beseech you, spare me; and believe me that, whatever may be the consequences, Fanny Hawthorn will never act in disobedience to her parent's wishes, great even though the sacrifice be that she may have to make."

"Heaven bless you, my sweet child," he exclaimed, fondly embracing her, "I know you will not, and I feel one of the happiest of old men in that blessed assurance. But come, dearest, dry your tears, and try to dismiss all gloomy and torturing thoughts from your mind, and to look forward to the future with that spirit of hope which the Almighty I am convinced will not permit to be disappointed. Prepare yourself to give Martin Bayford a most warm reception, for my word for it, Fanny, you will find him every way worthy of it, and you will be as happy as the days are long. For my own part, I am all impatience till I see the dear boy, who must have improved wonderfully in every respect since he has been away from England. Good-bye, Fanny, for the present, I have got to meet Mr. Chizzleton at his house, to talk matters over, but I shall return home in an hour or two, and in the meantime I dare say you can dispense with the society of such a silly old man as myself. Good bye, Fanny, good-bye, my love; remember what I have said."

With these words the kind-hearted old squire once more affectionately embraced his beautiful daughter, and then quitted the room.

When he was gone, poor Fanny, unable any longer to restrain her feelings, covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears. She could not but anticipate that sorrow was in store for her, to which the return of Martin Bayford to England would form the prelude; she could never sincerely love him, and the thoughts of her being compelled to become his wife, drove her almost to despair and madness.

But surely Martin, when she should again candidly assure him of the real sentiments she entertained towards him, would, even at the sacrifice of his own feelings, abandon all pretensions to her hand, and leave her unshackled, free, she would solemnly appeal to him, and, if he really sincerely loved her, and her happiness at heart, that appeal he could not resist.

Her mind wavered between hope, doubt, and fear, and in that melancholy state we must for the present leave her.

The shadows of evening had fallen around, and all was still and cheerless about the

gloomy residence of old Jonas Chizzleton, which even seemed to wear a more dismal aspect than usual on that occasion. Mr. Hawthorn had paid his promised visit, and having transacted the business with Jonas which he had called upon, he had returned home.

There was no one to be seen near the old house, in fact, very few persons at any time passed that way, for the spot was a lonely one, and such as no one would seek for pleasure or enjoyment.

But suddenly the tall form of a man was seen to approach stealthily towards the building, and to look anxiously up at the different windows.

His features were concealed beneath a black mask, and his form was enveloped in a large military cloak, altogether his appearance was very suspicious.

Having cautiously surveyed the front of the building, and looked about to see that no one was watching him, he paused for a moment and muttered to himself:—

"All's well, there is no one to observe me, and hitherto everything seems to favour my designs. It is a desperate deed, and one that demands the full exercise of my nerves to enable me to accomplish it, but I am determined, and after proceeding thus far, it would be folly in me to retrace my steps. It will soon be over, and with no one to watch, the crime, or rather the perpetrator of it will be enshrouded in profound mystery."

Having thus spoken, the mysterious stranger walked round to the back of the house, and stopping at a low door, he took forth a bunch of keys, several of which he tried, and at last found one which fitted the lock, and after some exertion the door flew open, and he entered silently, closing the door after him.

It was now quite dark, and not a sound was to be heard in the gloomy old building, save the snoring of "Mother Sniggs," who either overcome by the fatigue of the day, or from the effect of strong gin, with which she was accustomed to indulge and console herself, had fallen sound off to sleep in the arm chair in the kitchen.

Mr. James Chizzleton had retired some time to his chamber—which was a dreary looking room at the top of the house, scantily and badly furnished—but not with idea of going to bed, although he had felt rather indisposed, and a most unusual depression of spirits all the day.

There was a lighted lamp glimmering on the table, and underneath the bedstead was an iron chest containing a large amount of money in gold and silver, and numerous valuable and important documents, which the old man had been examining, but had now seated himself in his arm chair by the

side of the bed, and with his elbows placed upon the table, and his chin resting upon his hands, seemed to be completely lost in gloomy meditation.

"What can be the meaning of this strange feeling that has annoyed and disturbed me all the day, and which I find it impossible to get rid of?" he at length said; "I never experienced such a sensation before, and am at a loss to account for it, unless it be the continued absence of Martin, whom I expected in England some days ago. I hope that nothing has happened to the dear boy. Psha! why should I unnecessarily alarm myself? He will be here anon, no doubt, and then I shall feel happy."

He paused, and again reflected.

"It's no use," he at last once more said; "I cannot arouse myself. Dismal forebodings of something dreadful being about to happen to me, haunt my imagination, and a shuddering sensation of dread steals over me. I wish it was morning, that I might walk forth in the daylight, and endeavour to recruit my spirits. But I must not give way to this, I have felt ill all the day, so I will e'en retire to bed, and perhaps a night's rest will serve to restore me. Where's that old rascal Snarley? He ought to have looked in to see how I was before this, but I suppose that he, like all the rest of the world, is beginning to neglect me. Bah! how I hate and despise everybody, except my dear nephew, Martin, and he I know will be the pride and comfort of my old age. But I must see Snarley before I go to bed."

He rung a small hand-bell, which stood on the table, loudly, two or three times, and at length Mr. Samuel Snarley slowly made his appearance.

"Snarley!" said Jonas, in an angry voice.

"Yes, dear, sir," replied that respectable individual, with a low bow.

"Where the devil have you been?"

"No where, my dear master; did you want me?"

"Of course I did. Didn't you know that I was ill?"

"Alas! alas! honoured, sir," sighed Snarley.

"Very ill, damned ill," said Jonas in surly tones.

"Alackaday! alackaday!" groaned Snarley turning up the whites of his eyes.

"Yes, and you didn't care whether I were dying or not, I suppose."

"Oh, gracious! dying? You terrify me, oh, heaven forbid, my good, kind master."

"I'm going to bed."

"With the blessing of God! and may you have a good night's rest. Can I do anything for you?"

"No, only take yourself off, and mind you call me at an early hour in the morning, I

have business of importance to attend to-morrow."

"I will be sure to do as you command, good Mr. Chizzleton. Good night, and—"

"Stop! why are you in such a confounded hurry? I haven't done with you yet."

"Pardon me, I—"

"Are all the door fastened?"

"Yes, my good sir."

"Has mother Sniggs gone to bed?"

"She's fast asleep in her arm chair, sir?"

"Drunk as usual, I suppose?"

"Yes sir."

"Damn her."

"Ah! it is shocking, dear Mr. Chizzleton. Is that all you want to say to me?"

"All."

"Then I suppose I may go?"

"Yes, be off."

Mr. Snarley bowed obediently, and made his exit instantaneously, and Jonas once more resumed his seat, resting his elbows on the table, and burying his face in his hands, and for a few minutes—his back being towards the door—again became lost in thought.

Suddenly the room door was cautiously and silently opened, and the same mysterious and suspicious looking being we have before described as secretly entering the house, appeared, and having looked eagerly towards the old man for an instant, closed the door in the same silent manner, and then stole on tip-toe across the room and concealed himself in a remote corner.

"It's no use giving way to these gloomy thoughts," at length muttered old Jonas, arousing himself; "and for which I see no reason. Yet they will continue to annoy me. I am sleepy, so I may as well go to bed at once, and perhaps I shall be better in the morning. I hope old Snarley won't forget to call me. Shall I put out the light? No, I don't feel inclined to be in the dark to night, so I'll e'en let it burn out. I wonder when Martin will arrive, I long to see him. Time, no doubt, has worked a marvellous improvement in his personal appearance. Hah!"

Having thus soliloquised, the old man walked to the room door and locked it, then slowly undressed himself, and retired to bed.

For some minutes he turned restlessly about before he could settle himself down, but gradually he sunk off to sleep, and slept soundly.

Then the mysterious stranger stepped silently from the place of his concealment, and approaching the side of the bed, stooped down, and watched the sleeping old man anxiously, while at the same time a slight tremor for a moment agitated his frame, from which, however, he quickly seemed to recover himself.

"All's well," he whispered, "he sleeps."

He must wake no more. Let me be firm." "And yet," he added, after another brief pause, "it is a fearful deed, and psha! away with coward fear, it must be done, and any delay might be fraught with danger."

He glanced hastily around as he spoke, and his eye fell upon a knife which was lying on the table and which he eagerly seized, and again approached the old man, and leaning over him, was about to draw it across his throat, when Jonas muttered some words in his sleep, and the stranger drew himself behind the bed-curtains, for the moment interrupted in the perpetration of the atrocious deed which he contemplated.

All was again quiet, and the old man continued to sleep soundly.

Once more the stranger approached the bed, with the knife in his hand, for an instant looked at the unfortunate old man, as if still hesitating, then with desperate determination he drew the keen blade across his throat, inflicting a frightful gash, from which the blood spirted to the ceiling!

Poor old Jonas started convulsively up in the bed, with a frightful yell, and ghastly glaring eyes, there was a momentary struggle, an agonised clenching of the hands, then a gurgling sound, and all was over, the murderer had accomplished his finnish purpose, and old Jonas Chizzleton was thus hurried into the awful presence of his maker, to answer for the numerous sins he had committed throughout a long life of infamy.

CHAPTER CIX.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE MURDER.—THE MYSTERY.

For a minute or two the murderer stood and gazed at the ghastly corpse of his wretched victim, apparently horrified at the dreadful work of his own hands. He trembled violently, the knife fell from his hand, and a deep groan escaped him, which showed at once the intensity of the remorse he already felt for the frightful crime he had committed.

But he quickly recovered himself, and muttering :—"Psha, 'tis done, and cannot be undone. I have accomplished my object without interruption, and ought to be content," he walked cautiously to the door, which he unlocked, and after listening on the landing for a moment or two, and hearing not the least sound to alarm him, he noiselessly descended the stairs, and emerging from the house, hurried on his way, and was quickly out of sight in the darkness of the night.

What motive could have urged the mur-

derer to the perpetration of that atrocious crime? It was evidently not robbery, for he never attempted to touch a coin of the old man's hoard although it was before his eyes; was it then revenge? That was the only reasonable conclusion which might at first have been arrived at, but still it was wrapped in the most impenetrable mystery.

Mr. Samuel Snarley on leaving the chamber of the unfortunate Jonas on the night of the murder, made his way to the kitchen, not feeling disposed to retire to rest just then, and arousing Mother Sniggs, with some difficulty from her slumbers, invited her to a pleasant little bit of scandal with him, for an hour or so, wetted with something stonger than water, to which that interesting old lady feeling nothing loth, Snarley quickly produced from his pocket "a bottle of a refreshing beverage, which he called the "human creature," but which had very much the scent and flavour of what, in these vulgar modern times, is called gin, and himself and his fair companion having both mounted a short pipe, they commenced to enjoy themselves in the most rational and spirited manner, by drinking, smoking and libelling everything and everybody their hardest.

The consequence of this was, that in an almost inconceivable short space of time, they both became so drunk that they sunk to rest in the arms of Morpheus, and from which nothing seemed likely to disturb them for several hours, and perhaps it was fortunate for them that they did so, for had they heard the frightful yell which escaped the lips of their wretched master in his dying moments, and had hastened to the scene of the monstrous crime, before the assassin had effected his escape, they would doubtless have shared the same fate.

It was not till a late hour the next morning that Samuel Snarley awoke from his slumbers, and finding the sun streaming powerfully in at the casement, he began to recollect that he had neglected the strict injunctions of his master, namely, to call him early, and cursing himself for his forgetfulness, and having made up his mind to receive a severe lecture, he hastened to the chamber of the late Mr. Jonas Chizzleton.

He knocked at the door; no answer. He repeated the same, of course, with the same result; then he called the unfortunate gentleman's name two or three times, and still receiving no answer, he felt somewhat surprised.

"Dear me," said Mr. Snarley, "how very sound the old gentleman does sleep to be sure; and yet he doesn't even snore for a wonder."

He tried the door, and was surprised to find it unlocked, as he knew that his master—suspicious as he was of everybody—was

always very careful in fastening himself in, before retiring to rest.

Cautiously opening the door, therefore, for fear of disturbing him, he peeped into the room and towards the bed, but in an instant a cry of horror escaped him, and his knees knocked together at the frightful sight which presented itself.

The murdered man was lying on his back, fully revealing the fearful gash in his throat, his features distorted by the dreadful agonies of death, and weltering in his blood.

For a moment, and a moment only Mr. Snarley stood transfixed to the spot, and gazed appalled; then rushing from the room in a state of terror and distraction, which may be better imagined than we can describe it, and hastened down the stairs, calling loudly upon the name of mother Sniggs.

With the greatest difficulty he was enabled to inform the old woman of what had happened, and her terror surpassed, if possible, his own. Scarcely knowing what they did, the two affrighted old creatures rushed from the house—using the precaution, however, of securing the door after them—and made their way as fast as they could towards Hawthorn Hall, to inform the worthy squire, who was also a magistrate, of the awful occurrence which had taken place.

The squire and his daughter were sitting at breakfast, when a servant announced the sudden arrival of Mr. Snarley and his fellow servant, in a state of the greatest terror, and added that they desired to see him (Mr. Hawthorn) immediately.

This request was instantly complied with, and Snarley and mother Sniggs, both ghastly pale and trembling, stood before the astonished Mr. Hawthorn and his daughter, unable to utter a word.

"For goodness sake, what is the matter with you and Mrs. Sniggs, Snarley?" eagerly inquired the squire; "what has occurred to alarm you in this manner, and what brings you here in such haste?"

Snarley tried to answer, but his teeth chattered, and he could not, while the sensitive Mrs. Sniggs—who it is only fair to state had not yet quite recovered from the effects of the gin of which she had so freely partaken the previous night with her companion—exhibited very strange symptoms of being about to fail.

"Why don't you answer, man?" at length said Mr. Hawthorn, becoming impatient; "is anything the matter?"

"The mat—mat—matter, sir," faltered out Snarney, looking ghastly, and his hair almost standing on end, "oh, yes, no-o ye-es, oh, oh, Mr. Hawthorn, my poor dear master, good Mr. Jonas Chizzleton, oh, dear!"

"Ah!" said the squire, "my respected friend is not ill I hope."

"Ill—ill," again stammered out Snarley, while Mother Sniggs groaned dismally and wrung her hands, "ill! no—yes—no that is to say, I wish he was, oh, I don't know what I say, my poor dear master will never want the doctor again."

"What do you mean?" hastily demanded Mr. Hawthorn.

"He—he's dead, murdered!" groaned Snarley, and he sunk overpowered in the lap of Mother Sniggs, who had just before sunk in a chair.

Mr. Hawthorn and Fanny started on this terrible announcement, and could scarcely believe the evidence of their ears.

"Dead! murdered!" exclaimed the squire, "can this be? Surely man, you must have lost your senses, and your companion seems to be in no better condition."

"Ye-es sir," returned the horror-struck and bewildered Mr. Snarley, "I—I—I am mad; that is to say I'm distracted, that is—oh, my revered master, whom I could have worshipped for his numerous virtues, such a horrid sight, Mr. Hawthorn, I shall never again have him out of my sight, the longest day I have to live, there he lies with his throat cut from ear to ear, and—oh, such a gash! horrible!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Fanny and her father in a breath, and they then questioned Snarley narrowly and eagerly as to the particulars of the dreadful affair, which with considerable difficulty they at last succeeded in eliciting from him.

They were greatly shocked, and Mr. Hawthorn deeming it prudent to detain Snarley and Mrs. Sniggs till a full examination had taken place, left them in charge at the hall, while himself and two or three of his men servants hastened to the scene of the fatal tragedy, having procured the keys from Mr. Snarley.

The dreadful sight which presented itself on proceeding to the room in which the murdered man was lying, filled them all with the greatest horror.

The nearest surgeon was immediately called in, who on examining the wound declared it as his opinion that it was quite impossible it could have been inflicted by the unfortunate man himself, and it was therefore quite evident that a frightful murder had been committed, but by whom was a mystery which at present it was quite impossible to penetrate, especially as robbery could not have been the motive, not an article in the room having been disturbed, and the key of the iron chest being found, it was opened, and its contents were evidently the same as they had been there deposited by the deceased.

Notwithstanding the universal disrespect in which the murdered man had been held

whilst living, the dreadful crime and the mystery in which it was enveloped, caused the greatest sensation in the neighbourhood, which seemed not at all likely soon to abate, and every means were immediately resorted to which seemed at all likely to lead to the discovery of the murderer or murderers, but with very little hope of success.

Three days after the awful occurrence, and by the instructions of Mr. Hawthorn—an inquest on the body having been held—preparations for the funeral being made, Martin Bayford arrived hastily and unexpectedly at the house, having, as he said, heard of the murder immediately on his arrival in England, which had only been the day before.

The grief and horror which the young man evinced, appeared to be so sincere that every one, especially Mr. Hawthorn and his daughter, could not but deeply sympathise with him, and endeavoured to impart consolation to him, but for some time without effect.

The remains of Jonas Chizzleton were consigned to the tomb; every possible means were continued to be adopted that might throw a light upon the dreadful affair, but without success; Snarley and mother Sniggs underwent several examinations, but without eliciting anything which was at all calculated to throw suspicion upon them; by degrees the excitement abated until it finally ceased altogether, and everything remained in the same state of mystery, and which did not seem at all likely ever to be unravelled.

The property of the late Mr. Jonas Chizzleton was secured by his nephew, a will being found which made him sole heir to his large fortune, which he had been hoarding for so many years and had obtained by such questionable means, Mr. Snarley and mother Sniggs were dismissed, the old house was fastened up, and at the earnest and friendly invitation of Mr. Hawthorn, Martin Bayford for the present took up his residence at the hall, much to the embarrassment and uneasiness of Fanny.

CHAPTER CX.

THE FATAL WEDDING.

Time, and the society in which he had mingled whilst on the Continent, had certainly effected a great improvement in the personal appearance and manners of Martin Bayford, and he was a young man whom few could behold—especially the fair sex—with-out admiration.

The good old squire was delighted with him and gave him every encouragement on his renewing his addresses to his fair daughter, but Fanny, although she treated

him with every respect and friendship could not love him, and there were times when she could not even behold him without a shuddering sensation of dread for which she was unable to account, and to think of him as her future husband, which it was but too certain he would be, caused her the greatest fear and anguish.

It was impossible that she could forget the ill-fated Valentine Wilden, the object of her childish love, and she had no heart to bestow upon any other man.

Martin Bayford, however—encouraged, as we have before said, by her father—persisted in his addresses, although he seemed to be too painfully aware of the unfavourable sentiments she entertained towards him, but nothing could be more marked and respectful than the attentions he paid to her.

Months wore away, and at length Martin succeeded in obtaining from Fanny an unwilling consent to become his wife, which she yielded principally in compliance with the will and wishes of her father, and the day was fixed for the auspicious event, and the most extensive preparations made to celebrate it with becoming spirit and liberality, the old squire being on the very tip toe of hope and expectation, but Fanny feeling more wretched and melancholy, as the day approached.

Notwithstanding all her efforts to banish it, the fearful predictions of Wandering Jenny would continue to haunt her memory, and she could not reflect upon it without her mind being agitated by strange fears and misgivings.

On one occasion when she had been induced to relate the circumstances to Martin, so remarkable was the agitation he exhibited and the expression of his countenance underwent so singular a change, that Fanny could not but look at him with a feeling of astonishment, not unmingled with terror, and she eagerly questioned him as to the cause of his extraordinary emotion.

He affected to smile, and attributed it to a momentary indisposition, and he took every care to avoid the subject in future.

At length the important day which was destined to unite the fate of the beautiful Fanny Hawthorn to that of the man whom she felt that it was impossible she could ever love, arrived, and all was joyful expectation at the old hall, arrangements to celebrate the auspicious event having, as has been before stated, been made on the most liberal and extensive scale, and every one seeming resolved to do full honour to the occasion, and to testify the high esteem in which they held the fair bride and her father.

But sad was the heart, and dismal the forebodings and misgivings of poor Fanny Hawthorn, and vain were all her endeavours

to arouse herself from that painful state of feeling.

The hour arrived, and the wedding procession moved slowly towards the village church, amid the merry peal of bells, and the blessings of the persons assembled.

The squire and the bridegroom looked all smiles and happiness, but the bride in spite of all her efforts to divest her mind of the gloomy thoughts and feelings that had taken possession of it, appeared with anything but those looks of content and hope that should animate the features on such an important occasion, and it was noticed by many with regret, and they felt that she was too surely about to "give her hand where her heart could never be."

And now they stand before the altar, the ceremony is commenced, and solemnly proceeds to the conclusion, and the beautiful Fanny is indissolubly the wife of Martin Bayford. Her husband, and her father embrace her affectionately, her friends warmly congratulate her and sincerely wish her every earthly happiness, but her cheek is pale, tears tremble in her eye, and her step falters as she moves along the aisle of the sacred edifice, supported by the arms of her husband and her father.

And all this time the bells continued to ring forth a merry peal, and the wedding procession, amid the cheers and "God bless you's," of the numerous persons assembled on the road, slowly wended its way on its return to Hawthorn Hall.

They had not proceeded far, however, when a voice from among the crowd was heard distinctly to say:—

"The new made bride, the hapless daughter of the too easy Squire Hawthorn will do well to remember the prophecy of Wandering Jenny, the cruel doom of the fair and innocent is sealed."

The words and the tones in which they were uttered fell upon the ear of Fanny like the knell of death, and hastily she, Martin, and her father, gazed in the direction from whence it proceeded, and there from amidst the crowd was seen the haggard countenance of the mysterious being Wandering Jenny glowing upon them, while a strange and disagreeable expression marked her repulsive features.

But it was for a moment only that she was seen, and before any one could seek to detain her, she was gone, how, so suddenly, it could scarcely be imagined.

Fanny uttered a cry of terror, and immediately fainted, and the utmost excitement prevailed, all being loud in their expressions of sympathy for the fair young bride, and in indignation against the mysterious and singular being who had been the cause of so much alarm.

It need scarcely be said that Mr. Hawthorn felt pained and surprised at the bold and extraordinary conduct of the old woman, and the effect it was likely to have on the mind of his daughter, especially taking place at such a particular time, but the confusion, the rage, and the agitation of Martin Bayford can scarcely be imagined, especially as he imagined that the eyes of every one were fixed upon him with looks of distrust and suspicion.

Mr. Hawthorn, however, soon sufficiently recovered himself to give instructions to two or three of his dependents to go immediately in pursuit of old Jenny, and to bring her before him, that she might be compelled to give some explanation of conduct so strange, so reprehensible, and unpardonable.

In a few minutes Fanny revived, and received the words of sympathy and consolation which fell from her father's lips with a flood of tears, but no sooner did she fix her eyes on Martin and heard the tones of his voice, as he attempted to address some observations to her, than she uttered a cry of agony and terror, and averted her looks with a shuddering sensation as though she had encountered some fearful object.

This added to the confusion and agitation of her husband, and a remarkable expression passed over his countenance which was painful to look upon, and which did not escape the observation of most of the astonished by-standers.

There was a pause of several minutes before they could at all recover themselves, when Martin silently drew one of the arms of his lovely bride within his, though she involuntarily shuddered when he did so, her father took the other, and thus solemnly and sadly the bridal procession moved on its way to the old hall.

It was a sad drawback to the pleasures of the day, and although Fanny endeavoured to compose her feelings, to banish the disagreeable adventure from her memory, and even at times to appear cheerful, and her father exerted himself to the utmost to do the same, and to contribute to the happiness and enjoyment of his numerous guests; and Martin Bayford tried to conquer his agitation, and to assume an aspect of content, and every one did their best to make the day what it was expected it would have been, namely, one of mirth and gladness; an air of gloom occasionally pervaded the whole of the company, and the entertainments continued with scarcely anything of life and spirit. It could be but too plainly seen that the fair bride was not happy, and that was quite sufficient to excite a painful and universal feeling of regret, and to destroy the pleasure and delight that otherwise would have reigned prominent on that important and extraordinary occasion.



Nor were the glances of fear and suspicion which Fanny occasionally cast towards her husband, or the confusion and excitement of his look and manners, suffered to pass unnoticed, and there were strange whisperings, mutterings, and forebodings among several of the guests, and old people shrugged their shoulders, and said it was a pity that so fair and innocent a maiden should have been compelled to sacrifice her happiness in becoming the wife of a man whom it was evident she did not love.

Contrary to previous arrangements the festivities were brought to a conclusion at an early hour, the numerous guests retired to their homes disappointed, and anxious for the bride, who had but too evidently commenced her matrimonial career under anything but favourable auspices; the strains of
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music ceased, the lights were extinguished, and all was silence and darkness in the old hall, where it had been anticipated at that time gaily, revelry, and happiness would have been at their height."

CHAPTER CXI.

THE TALE OF DAME MALVERN CONTINUED.

At this part of the long, but interesting tale of old Dame Malvern, which she related in her own simple language, she paused, as the time for our heroine and her companion to return to the farm was approaching, and deferred the continuation and conclusion of it to the following day, when her fair

visitors promised to call at the cottage again.

They had both listened to the old woman with much attention, and the farther she had proceeded, and the incidents grew upon each other, their interest increased, and the greater became their anxiety to know the future fortunes and ultimate fate of the fair Fanny Bayford.

"And was then the heroine of your tale in any way connected with or related to you, Mrs. Malvern," said Phoebe, "that you speak of her with such feeling, and appear to cherish her in your memory with so much reverence?"

"She was my mother," replied the dame, with much emotion, and a tear trickled down her furrowed cheek, "my own unfortunate mother, who, although I was deprived of her while but a child, and so many, many years have passed away since then, I can never cease to remember with feelings of the deepest emotion and affection, which I trust you can appreciate, and I need not attempt to describe. Even now she is vividly presented to my mind's eye as I have beheld her whilst living, and in the midst of sorrows and trials that were sufficient to break even the stoutest heart; I see her pale and melancholy countenance, her emaciated, careworn form, once so lovely, I could almost imagine that I feel her tears and kisses upon my cheeks, and hear the mournful tones of her voice, as she supplicated the blessings and protection of heaven upon my head, when it should please the Almighty to take her from me, and I should be left alone upon the wide world, and at the mercy of strangers."

"And your father?" said Amy.

"Alas," replied the dame, "even now I cannot think of him without feelings of anguish and terror, which I feel it impossible properly to describe. I shudder to think of his guilty, his fearful career, and the fate which finally befell him, and I hesitate to relate to you all the startling and revolting circumstances connected with his history, lest I should shock your ears by so doing."

"You have excited the deepest interest and curiosity of myself and friend, by what you have already related," remarked our heroine, "and we are anxious to hear the remainder of your narrative."

"Ah, well," said the dame, "then to-morrow, if it please you, I will proceed with it to the conclusion, though I much fear the length of it, and the melancholy facts it will reveal, will tire your patience."

Phoebe and Amy assured her to the contrary, and after some further conversation, and having promised to visit the cottage on the following morning, they took their departure.

They were punctual to the time appointed on the following day, and found the worthy Dame Malvern most anxiously awaiting their arrival. After some preliminary observations, the dame resumed her narrative, but which, as before, we shall proceed to relate in our own language.

And did the fair young bride, after the excitement and melancholy consequent upon the events we have recorded, had subsided, become happy and contented in her new position. Alas, no. And yet most anxiously she endeavoured to be so, or appear so, and to return the affection which her husband really at that time bestowed upon her, but it was all to no purpose; Valentine Wilden, although no more, still held the same place which he had ever done in her heart, and the prophetic words of Wandering Jenny were constantly in her memory, exciting doubts, fears, and misgivings, and her mind was ever the prey to the greatest care and anxiety.

From this—in the absence of Martin—her father frequently sought to arouse her, but with very little effect, and he now saw too plainly that she was sacrificed to one whom she could now but barely esteem, much more love, and he could not but bitterly reproach himself for having been the principal cause of bringing about so ill-assorted a marriage.

It was impossible that Martin Bayford could help keenly feeling the unhappiness of his situation, but he bore it with becoming patience, and uttered not to Fanny or her father a word of complaint or reproach, although there were times when he wore a gloomy brow, and thoughts of the most torturing description seemed to rack his mind.

The new married couple continued to reside at the hall, and Mr. Hawthorn took every means in his power to dissipate the *enui* which ever held possession of his daughter's mind, by constantly making those whose society he thought might be agreeable to her his guests, but it was all to no purpose, and, in fact, her melancholy seemed rather to increase than abate, and all prospect of a change for the better appeared to be at an end.

There was one circumstance which excited much astonishment and useless speculation, and that was the extraordinary and mysterious disappearance of old Wandering Jenny, who, since the day of the wedding had neither been seen or heard of, and it was impossible to form any conjecture as to what had become of her.

The house in which old Jonas Chizzleton had resided was now entirely deserted, and suffered to fall into decay; Martin Bayford always avoiding it as much as possible, and being at any time willing to walk a distance

out of the way in order to do so; and any allusion to the frightful murder of the old man excited him in the most remarkable manner, and he took every opportunity of waiving it as quickly as he could.

Thus several months wore tediously and unhappily away, when Fanny presented her husband with a girl, which for a time seemed to impart some little sunshining to the gloom by which their fate had hitherto been surrounded, and some hopes were entertained that it might be the means of effecting a favourable change in their circumstances altogether; but those wishes and expectations were not realised to any extent.

And now troubles of a more immediate description were about to befall them.

For many years Mr. Hawthorn had had a suit in chancery, which had cost him the greatest care and anxiety, and put him to great expense. But that he had endured with patience, entertaining as he did the most sanguine hopes and expectations of a fortunate result. But those were doomed to be fearfully and cruelly disappointed, it was decided against him, and all but absolute ruin was the consequence, and Hawthorn Hall, with the valuable estates attached to it, must have gone with the wreck, had it not been for the husband of Fanny, whose fortune was sufficiently ample to enable him to secure them, and to support them all in the same position as formerly.

The poor old squire, however, felt this misfortune most severely, the more so, as it placed him under so heavy an obligation to his son-in-law, and he could no longer but consider himself in the light of a dependant where he used to command and dispense his hospitalities so freely.

At times, too, he could not help imagining—for it could surely be nothing more than imagination—that Martin was anxious he should feel the full weight of the obligation he was under to him, and he did not treat him with the same respect that he had formerly done, and that his behaviour towards Fanny was far less affectionate and indulgent than it had been.

Frequently, when Martin was from home, he found her in tears, and though he questioned her closely as to the cause, but could not elicit from her any explanation, and she offered not a murmur of complaint against her husband, he had more than sufficient reason to fear that he was the cause.

Poor Fanny felt for her father's misfortunes most severely, and the alteration which had taken place in his personal appearance filled her with alarm, and, in fact, there was not a person who knew the kind and generous old squire, that did not deeply sympathise with him.

Such a change at length took place in the

looks and manners of Martin Bayford, that it was noticed by every one who came in contact with him. He became sullen, gloomy and morose towards his wife, her father, and everybody else, frequently absenting himself from the house for days and nights together, and often even returning in a disgusting state of intoxication, when his conduct was such as to shock the feelings of all who came near him.

It was then that the true misery of the fate which was in store for her was made more fearfully apparent to Mrs. Bayford, and she could not but look-forward to it with feelings of the greatest dread.

If she ventured to remonstrate with him, and to advise him for his good in the most gentle manner, she invariably received from him some coarse, and even brutal reply, and he did not hesitate to accuse her, by her coldness, want of duty, and neglect, of being the cause of all.

It was quite evident that if indeed he had ever felt any sincere affection for her, such a sentiment no longer existed in his breast, and that, in fact, he considered both her and her unfortunate father as burthens he would gladly get rid of.

It was also soon apparent that the abandoned and reckless course he was then pursuing, was rapidly impoverishing his fortune, and that if he persisted in it, it must bring him to ultimate ruin, the greater portion of his time being spent at the gaming table, and at which he frequently lost large sums of money.

The fearful effects of this guilty conduct were soon made manifest; he found it necessary to curtail the expenses of the establishment, many of the old domestics who had been for years in the service of the good old squire, and had hoped to remain with him till his death, were dismissed from the hall, some of the finest paintings which had decorated the walls, and were so much admired by all who saw them, were sold, even the jewels presented by her husband to Mrs. Bayford on her wedding-day were disposed of, and, in fact, everything betokened the rapid approach of that ruin which had been so long anticipated.

Fanny looked forward to it with feelings of the utmost dread, if not horror: but it was more on account of her father and her child that she did so, and there were times when she was so excited by the fearful picture of the future which her imagination drew, that she could not restrain the expression of them, and she heaped her bitterest reproaches upon the head of her guilty husband, while at the same time she was wrought up almost to a pitch of madness.

Many were the dreary hours that Mrs. Bayford and her father passed together while

the abandoned profligate was from home, and they could not but look forward to his return with feelings of the most unconquerable dread and dismal foreboding, for every night they were certain brought them still nearer the brink of ruin, and every hour they expected the threatened storm to burst over their heads, and to overwhelm them with its fury.

Alas, what a bitter contrast did the present exhibit to the happy past, when Fanny was unshackled, free, and care was a stranger to her breast. When the good old squire knew no joy but in the affection of his innocent daughter, and her sweetest smiles ever rewarded him for the care which he so studiously bestowed upon her.

And how severely did Mr. Hawthorn reproach himself for the misery he had brought upon her by almost compelling her to become the wife of that man whom he might too plainly have seen she could not love, and whom she viewed with repugnance, if not with absolute abhorrence at the last.

But Fanny, whenever he thus expressed his regret in her presence, endeavoured to soothe him, and to acquit him of all blame, believing as she knew he had done that he was only seeking to promote her happiness and future prosperity by her union with Martin Bayford, at that time having no suspicion of his real character.

Mr. Hawthorn, however, could not thus easily acquit himself, and the thought continued to prey upon his spirits, coupled with his broken fortunes, with the most dangerous effect.

There was another circumstance, too, which as it was so long since it had happened, Mr. Hawthorn and his daughter could not help reflecting upon with the most dismal and unaccountable feelings of dread, and that was the strange and awful prediction of old Wandering Jenny, on the natal day, and the solemn and earnest way in which she had uttered it, and thus, in spite of their pretended scepticism, excited so much unpleasant feeling in their minds, the more particularly as Martin ever evinced the greatest agitation, and invariably endeavoured to change the subject whenever it was alluded to in his presence.

And yet surely the words of a half crazy old woman should not be suffered to make any serious impression upon them, and they chided themselves for giving way to it, still they found it utterly impossible to dismiss the thought from their minds.

And thus day after day wore sadly away, and more gloomy and threatening became their prospects, and the conduct of the misguided Martin became, if possible, still worse, at times it even descending into the lowest ruffianism, especially when he returned home

in a state of intoxication, which he frequently did.

Their child, too, seemed to be to him an object of absolute hatred, and he ever repelled her innocent endearments with the greatest brutality.

It was night, all was hushed in gloomy silence in the old hall, and poor Fanny was sitting alone in one of the lower rooms, for her father had been absent from her society all the afternoon, and she imagined he had by this time retired to rest.

Her thoughts as usual were of the most melancholy description, and her spirits laboured under even more than their wonted depression, for circumstances every day became worse, and it seemed as if the crisis of their fate was rapidly approaching.

All the horrors of poverty stared her in the face, and she could not contemplate the sufferings that were evidently in store for them without the utmost dread.

The night was wild and stormy, and in perfect unison with the state of her mind, and every moment, as fresh forebodings racked her brain, her anguish increased, and she in vain endeavoured to find the least degree of consolation.

The storm grew louder, the thunder rattled in deafening peals, broad sheets of the most vivid lightning glared in the heavens, and the rain pattered violently against the casements, and descended upon the earth in perfect torrents. But still the neglected, suffering wife continued at the window—which commanded a full view of the extensive grounds attached to the hall, which now presented a desolate appearance, no care having for some time been taken to keep them in the order which had formerly characterised them—and gazed out upon the horrors of the night with a listless and vacant eye.

Martin was still absent, and as the time was getting late, Fanny scarcely looked for his return that night, and, in fact, she thought of it with even a greater feeling of dread than usual, and the most torturing forebodings of something fatal about to happen continued—in spite of all her efforts to conquer them—to haunt and distract her mind.

While she thus sat, and as her eyes still vacantly wandered over the dreary scene before her, she suddenly fancied that she beheld the dark outlines of a human form approaching slowly across the lawn towards the window where she was, but it was so indistinct that at first she could not discover whether it was that of a man or woman.

However she could not remove her eyes from it, and watching it more narrowly, she was enabled at length to perceive that it was one of the female sex, and apparently extremely aged, to judge from her form, which

was bent almost double, while, as she came, stealthily along, her limbs seemed feeble and tottering, and scarcely able to support her.

Notwithstanding the decrepid appearance of this wretched object, Fanny could not behold her without a sensation of alarm, for which she was at a loss exactly to account, but at the same time she was unable to remove her eyes from her, and watched her with the greatest curiosity.

Who could she be, and what could be her reason for lurking near the hall at so unreasonable an hour? These were questions which she naturally asked herself, and before she could answer them satisfactorily, the woman had approached to within a few paces of the window at which she was seated, and she there paused for a minute, and seemed to be gazing earnestly towards it, while Mrs. Bayford being now able to scrutinise her figure more narrowly, could not help thinking that it was familiar to her, though where she had seen it before she could not call to mind.

She was not long, however, kept in any suspense or doubt upon the subject; suddenly the lightning glared full upon her, and it will be unnecessary to describe her surprise and agitation when she recognised the shrivelled and repulsive-looking features of the mysterious old woman, Wandering Jenny, whom she had not seen since the day of her fatal union, and whom every one supposed to have been long since dead.

She could scarcely help giving utterance to an exclamation of terror when she recognised her, but the old woman approached the window nearer, and as she did so the expression of her features, which were fixed full upon Fanny, was of the most frightful and malicious description.

She pointed one of her bony hands towards her, while the other leant upon her crutch, then her lips moved, and Mrs. Bayford could distinctly hear her call upon her name, in a voice the tones of which sounded harsh and disagreeable in her ears.

Scarcely knowing in her agitation what she did, Mrs. Bayford opened the window, and the old woman approaching it closely, put her head in at it and gazed at her still more earnestly, and with an expression of countenance that made her tremble, as the fearful prediction she had formerly uttered, and which once more seemed about to escape her lips, rushed with overwhelming force upon her memory, and excited nameless terrors in her breast.

However, at length conquering her feelings in the best manner she could, and resolved to discover what the purport of the old woman's business could be, Mrs. Bayford demanded—

"Strange woman, whom I had never

wished to behold again, for what purpose do you now come hither, at this unseasonable hour of the night? Speak it quickly, and begone."

"You command me, wretched victim to a cruel destiny, but one from which it is impossible for you to escape," said the wandering hag, with a mingled look of pity and scorn, "and yet I mark the trembling terror with which you behold me, and await the words that are about to escape my lips. Dost remember the prediction?—dost remember the warning I gave you? It would have been well for you and your unhappy father had you not disregarded it at the time it was spoken, for then the designs of the guilty would have been frustrated, and you might have been spared the troubles you have already experienced, and those that are yet in store for you. But you have chosen your fate, and must e'en submit to it:—

In vain from your doom you may seek to flee,
In vain try to shun your destiny;
The spell is wove, and whate'er betides,
Peace ne'er can be known to the doom'd one's
bride.

The storms have lowered and burst and broke,
To grief and sorrow you've now awoke.
Behold!"

As the fearful being uttered the last word with peculiar emphasis, she pointed significantly towards a human form approaching across the lawn, and then hurried away, and was lost to the sight before Mrs. Bayford could recover herself from the astonishment and alarm which the appearance of the singular old woman, and the fearful words she had uttered, had caused her.

CHAPTER CXII.

RUIN AND DESOLATION.

But still the unhappy Mrs. Bayford kept her eyes fixed upon the approaching figure, which was that of a man, and the lightning's glare soon enabled her to perceive that it was her husband.

She shuddered, but hastily endeavoured to conceal the feelings that agitated her, and soon after Martin Bayford, his cheeks flushed, and his eyes wild and bloodshot from the effects of the intoxicating drink of which he had so freely partaken, staggered into the room, and sunk into a chair, gazing angrily at his wife, who could not help trembling as she met the savage expression of his countenance.

"Now then, woman," he said in a coarse voice, "what are you loitering about here for? Why are you not at rest?"

"Rest," repeated his unfortunate wife, with a deep sigh and in a melancholy tone of voice, "alas, rest is not for me while you continue this guilty life of folly, extravagance, and dissipation, which has already brought you to the brink of ruin, and must shortly plunge us down the fearful abyss."

"Cease fool!" he sternly replied, "I am not in a mood to listen to any of your canting lectures and reproaches, and you will do well not to enrage me. The play has been all against me to-night, and I have lost every guinea that I had in my possession, when I flattered myself that I should bask in the smiles of the fickle goddess, curse her!"

"Oh, Martin," remonstrated Mrs. Bayford, with a look which might have subdued a less obdurate heart than his, "will nothing awaken you from this mad and fearful dream? Have you no consideration for myself, our child, or my aged father, who views more with feelings of sorrow and regret, than anger or reproach the career of guilt and wanton extravagance which is bringing us all to destruction?"

"Bah," returned the misguided man, passionately and impatiently, "you annoy me. Cease, I say again. The loss I have this night sustained, must be redeemed, let the consequences be what they may."

"Alas," sighed his wife, "that is impossible, 'you have already carried your mad and ruinous career to the utmost extremity, and it is impossible that you can redeem your losses. There is nothing but the most abject poverty and misery now left to us.'"

"Psha," returned Martin, "I tell you again that I am not going to submit to my confounded run of ill-luck to-night and for some time past, without another trial at the wheel of fortune, and I have the opportunity of doing so."

"What mean you?" eagerly and suspiciously demanded Mrs. Bayford.

"Oh," said Martin, with a triumphant smile and a sinister expression of countenance, "that is easily explained. Of course, you are aware that the poverty of your father, brought about by that damned lawsuit in which he was foolish enough to engage, has made this old hall mine by a deed duly signed and sealed, and that now he is merely my tenant at will, in a manner of speaking, a pauper living on my benevolence, and whom I can eject any moment."

"Gracious heaven!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayford, with a look of agony and horror, "I knew not that; surely it cannot be?"

"It is true," returned the heartless man, with perfect coolness; "you have no reason to doubt it, and the old gentleman will not deny it. It is fortunate I have that to fall back upon; I have already borrowed certain sums of money on it, but I must now mort-

gage it to a larger extent, and see what fortune will turn up in my favour this time."

"Martin," gasped forth his wretched wife, fixing upon him a look of horror and reproach that ought to have been enough to penetrate his guilty soul, "oh, surely you cannot have become so completely lost to every feeling of shame, as to contemplate so monstrous and unnatural a deed as that you have just now dared to hint at? For the love of heaven pause, unless you would bring down the most terrible maledictions upon your head. Would you render the poor grey-haired man, myself, and our innocent child houseless, and all to gratify and pander to your accursed vices? Beware, I say, or terrible most assuredly will be the punishment that will overtake you."

"Will you cease this whining nonsense, woman?" exclaimed the guilty man, fiercely, "or do you seek to exasperate me beyond endurance? I must, I will have money, and under the circumstances, and in my present state of mind, I am not very particular by what means I obtain it. Let that suffice you, and leave me to myself, for as your society is not likely to be very agreeable to me to-night, I am inclined to remain where I am."

"Heartless, cruel man," said Mrs. Bayford, unable any longer to control the disgust of her feelings, or to restrain her reproaches; "and is it thus that you reward my patient endurance of sufferings inflicted by your misconduct and reckless extravagance and dissipation? Oh, shame, shame! If a long course of guilt had not made you completely callous to every sense of feeling, you would blush to own yourself so great a villain as that you have proved yourself to be by the threats that you have just now held out."

"Villain!" repeated her husband, furiously, starting to his feet, his features distorted by rage, and clenching his fist; "this to me?"

"Aye," replied the hapless woman, firmly, and worked up to a pitch of the greatest excitement by the disgust and indignation of her feelings, "villain! I repeat the word, for the cruel treatment I have so long experienced at your hands, and the guilty designs which you now contemplate, fully entitle you to it, and I can no longer withhold the bitter reproaches you so justly deserve. Shame, shame, I say once more. Oh, heaven, what a terrible fate is mine to have to call you husband."

"I will hear no more!" cried Martin, in a voice of ungovernable rage, "that opprobrious epithet has aroused my utmost resentment, and must not, shall not go unpunished."

As the guilty man uttered these words, he aimed a determined blow at his unfortunate

wife, but at the moment his arm was arrested, and Mr. Hawthorn, who had come from a side door, attracted by the noise of the altercation, and had been listening unobserved, interposed to save his daughter from the brutal outrage which her ruffianly husband was about to commit.

Martin Bayford started back a few paces abashed and confounded at this unexpected appearance, and his countenance showed the powerful excitement of his feelings, while the aged Mr. Hawthorn fixed upon him a look of the bitterest reproach and resentment, but for a minute or two the power of his emotion would not allow him to speak.

The anguish of Mrs. Bayford, as she rushed to the arms of her father was almost to great for endurance, and even Martin, hardened as he was, could not for the moment help feeling some small degree of remorse, and he averted his looks, ashamed of the savage and cowardly act he had been about to commit.

"Martin Bayford," at length solemnly said the poor old gentleman, "and are you he I once thought so good and honourable, and in that belief gave to you the hand of my innocent child, thinking that it would be your future study to render her one of the happiest of human beings? Alas, how cruelly was I deceived, and what bitter cause have I since had to repent of my folly."

"You may spare your reproaches, Mr. Hawthorn," replied Martin, scornfully, "for I am not in the humour just now to listen to them; neither is Martin Bayford the sort of man to submit to be schooled by any one. Your daughter is my wife, and it would be well for you to teach her her duty towards me, rather than continually to heap upon me her abuse and reproaches, and to act in disobedience to my will."

"Forbear, Martin," said his indignant and heart-broken wife, "cease thus to persecute myself and my aged parent, unless you would drive us both to madness. Have you indeed closed your heart to every feeling of shame or remorse?"

"Remorse," repeated Martin, with a look of contempt. "I have nothing to regret or repent that I am aware of, and will not have my authority called in question, Mr. Hawthorn I shall have something further to say to you on this subject on some future occasion, and it will be well for you not to seek to offend me."

"Misguided man," said Mr. Hawthorn, "will nothing whatever awaken you to a sense of the cruelty and injustice of your conduct? Are you resolved to rush headlong to destruction, and to plunge those with whom you are so unfortunately connected into it also? My poor daughter, oh, how my heart bleeds for the wretched fate to

which I was, alas, the principal cause of consigning you."

Mrs. Bayford threw herself in his arms, and unable at all to control the emotions that agitated her distracted bosom, she wept bitterly.

"No more of this," said her husband impatiently, and grasping her by the wrist, "I have listened to such sickening nonsense long enough, but will hear no more of it. Retire to your chamber, Mr. Hawthorn, and you, madam must accompany me."

"But a moment," supplicated Mrs. Bayford

"I will not be disobeyed," sternly and peremptorily observed Martin.

She saw it was useless to resist, and having with a heavy heart embraced her aged parent, she suffered herself to be led by her brutal and abandoned husband from the room.

"Unfortunate woman," said our heroine, when Dame Malvern had arrived at this part of her tale, "her's was indeed a terrible fate, and I wonder that she could endure it with any degree of fortitude. But still is it not strange that she could continue to live with a man whom it was impossible that she could look upon with any other feelings than those of dread and abhorrence?"

"It does indeed appear so," replied the dame, "but unfortunately, circumstances had so linked her to her cruel destiny that she could not extricate herself from it. Alas, my poor mother, I cannot recal to my memory the fearful troubles it was your cruel lot to have to endure without feelings of anguish and regret. And then the events that followed those I have already related, I cannot think of without a shudder."

"Pray proceed," said Amy, "for I am anxious to hear the ultimate fate of your parent."

"Alas," said the dame, "it was a most melancholy one, and that of my father was so awful that I dread to record it. But I will hasten to a conclusion."

Phoebe and Amy again assured her of the interest they felt in listening to her remarkable recital, and the dame proceeded, though not in the same language that we have deemed it better to relate them.

CHAPTER CXIII.

THE CAREER OF GUILT AND STORM OF THE ADVERSITY.

After the departure of Martin and his wife, the wretched Mr. Hawthorn remained in the room, completely lost and stupified with the anguish of grief and despair.

He saw plainly that the storm was about

to burst over the devoted heads of himself and his daughter, and he could not but anticipate the worst.

That he should long live to experience the same and even more severe troubles than those that had hitherto befallen him, he felt convinced was impossible, for his constitution was fast failing him, under the numerous shocks he had received, but he pictured to himself in the most vivid colours the miserable life of poverty, privation, and persecution which poor Fanny would have to endure, and he shuddered with a feeling of horror at the contemplation, and which was greatly increased when the fearful prophecy of Wandering Jenny recurred to his memory, while dreadful forebodings haunted his imagination.

"Oh, God," he exclaimed, in the agony of his feelings, "why did you permit my poor child and Martin Bayford to meet? And why did I ever give my consent to their union, when I knew so well that her heart could never be his, and all her fondest affections were buried in the grave of Valentine Wilden? It was cruel and unjust, and I have much to reproach myself with. Heaven pardon me, and protect her when I am no more."

He was interrupted by a strange rattling sound at the window, and turning hastily round to ascertain the cause of it, he started back with considerable alarm and astonishment, on beholding a human form standing before it, and the features, which were of the most unearthly description, fixed intently upon him.

He looked again more earnestly than before, and he could not help giving utterance to an exclamation of surprise, when he recognised Wandering Jenny.

But it was only for a moment that he saw her, for waving her hand she suddenly disappeared from the window, and vanished like a ghost, but how or whither it was impossible to imagine.

In a state of the greatest agitation which such a singular circumstance, and at that hour of the night was likely to create, Mr. Hawthorn rushed to the window, which was still standing open, as Mrs. Bayford had left it, and looked anxiously out upon the grounds of the old hall, but although the lightning revealed everything to him distinctly for some distance, he could not see anything of her, and his wonder and excitement increased.

"Could this have been some strange delusion of the senses?" he exclaimed, "or am I awake? But I could not have been deceived; it was certainly that mysterious woman, Wandering Jenny, and what then can her coming at such a time as this portend? I tremble to think, and the fearful presentiments that have so long haunted and disturbed my imagination gain strength every

moment. Heaven help us, for too much do I fear that some dreadful calamity is at hand."

He raised his hands and eyes solemnly and supplicatingly towards that heaven to which he appealed as he thus spoke, and after once more glancing anxiously from the window at the dismal scene beyond, he slowly quitted the room, and with a brain distracted by the most racking thoughts, he ascended the stairs which led to his own chamber.

It was now long past midnight, and the tempest had not in the least abated in violence, the warning of the angry elements, being quite awful to listen to, but Mr. Hawthorn heeded it not, but throwing himself in the arm chair by the side of the bed, he abandoned himself to all those gloomy and torturing thoughts that so completely occupied his mind, neither inclined for the present, and almost fearing to retire to bed.

The strange re-appearance of Wandering Jenny, continued to perplex and astonish him, filling his mind with wild conjectures, and all of that vague and unsatisfactory description that they only served to bewilder him the more. But still he could not remove the fatal impression that some fearful calamity was on the eve of taking place, and never in the midst of all his sufferings had he felt so truly depressed in spirits and so wretched before.

Gradually, however, a heavy and irresistible drowsiness stole over him, and unable to undress himself, or to seek his couch, he fell fast asleep in his old arm chair.

We need not describe the various feelings that racked the mind of the unfortunate Mrs. Bayford as her brutal husband, in sullen silence, and with looks that showed the guilty thoughts that were passing in his mind, conducted her to their chamber. She feared to accompany him after what had taken place, and could not help viewing him with a feeling almost amounting to hatred, but she ventured not to say a word, and they retired to rest without entering into any further conversation.

Martin, whose head was heavy from the effects of the drink he had so freely indulged in, soon fell off to sleep, but his wife continued to press her pillow and to court repose in vain, for racking thought, and the troubles which were so fast accumulating around her, kept her waking, and every moment painful reflections became more insupportable, and drove her almost to madness.

There was everything in the events of that evening to excite her worst apprehensions and it was to no purpose that she sought to dismiss them from her recollection, for the more she tried to do so the stronger was the hold which they seemed to gain upon her.



The threats which her husband had held out regarding the old hall, and of which she had not the courage to inform her father, were the principal sources of her alarm, for in them she saw at once the completion of that ruin she had so long anticipated, and from which she now saw no possibility of their escaping.

Great as were the miseries they had hitherto endured, those that were yet in store for them, and to which they must shortly be exposed, she was convinced were far more terrible, and she shrunk from the contemplation of them with a feeling of dread which she was unable to conquer.

And when the final blow should come (which assuredly it must shortly), what would become of herself, her father, and her innocent child? She was at a loss to

answer the question, and almost feared to endeavour to do so. Better, she thought, far better would it be for them, should heaven at once permit them to die, rather than for them to linger on in the midst of the horrors by which they would be surrounded, without one friend in the world who could sincerely sympathise with, or would render them the least assistance in that the most frightful hour (as it would probably be) of their need.

Again, the words of Wandering Jenny seemed to wring in her ears, and as she gazed upon the once handsome features of her husband, now swoln and disfigured by constant intoxication, a sensation of fear, almost amounting to horror, came over her, and she could scarcely trust herself to remain by his side, so strange

and powerful was the effect it had upon her.

It seemed as though his rest was disturbed by fearful dreams, for he frequently started, and, at times, some incoherent words would escape his lips, which although his wife could not understand, appeared to convey a meaning of terror, and to tell of a guilty conscience.

She would have given anything could she have been enabled to go to sleep that she might have obtained a temporary forgetfulness of her sorrows, but it came not to her relief, and thus more than an hour of the greatest possible misery wore tediously and slowly away.

The storm was now at its most fearful height, and one of the most terrific flashes of lightning that had yet been seen, suddenly shot from the sky, and for a moment or two seemed to light up the country for miles around in a blaze.

This was immediately followed by a peal of thunder, so loud and fearful in its violence, that it seemed to shake the old hall to its very foundation, and excited a feeling of terror in the breast of Mrs. Bayford, which made her shudder, and which she was totally unable to conquer.

Martin Bayford was aroused from sleep; and starting hastily from the bed, he gazed around him in stupified amazement for a moment or two, quite at a loss to understand what had happened.

A rumbling noise like the falling of ruins immediately succeeded, and the flooring of the chamber in which Martin Bayford and his wife stood seemed to tremble beneath their feet; at the same time, they could hear the hasty opening and closing of doors, accompanied by hurried footsteps and the confused sound of several voices in different parts of the building, as if in terror.

"Good God!" exclaimed the alarmed Mrs. Bayford, "what can have happened? Surely the lightning must have struck some part of the hall, which seems to have fallen. Oh, my poor father! The principal noise seemed to proceed from that wing of the building in which he sleeps, and my fears forebode the worst."

"Bah!" replied her husband, in surly tones, but at the same time hastily dressing himself, "you are always giving way to some foolish fears or fancies."

While he spoke, however, the noise of the voices (which no doubt were those of the servants), grew louder, and from their chamber window, near which they stood, they suddenly beheld flames shoot up into the sky, and which seemed to come from

that part of the hall of which Mrs. Bayford had spoken.

"My worst fears are realised," cried the terrified Mrs. Bayford, "the lightning has struck the building, and those flames show too fearfully that it is on fire. My father! My unfortunate father! for heaven's sake, Martin, endeavour to save him, or he must perish!"

Martin gave utterance to an oath, and then dashing open the door, proceeded to ascend the stairs which conducted to that part of the hall in which the unfortunate Mr. Hawthorn slept, followed by his wife, and no sooner had they quitted the room than they had every fatal proof that their worst fears were not unfounded, for the reflection of the flames came from that direction, and from the cries of the servants they could ascertain that they were all rushing thither, no doubt with the hope of being able to rescue the poor old gentleman from his perilous situation.

To describe the emotions of Mrs. Bayford would be impossible, and as she rushed on towards the scene of destruction, and the terror of the catastrophe became the more apparent, the flames every instant evidently obtaining a stronger hold, she wrung her hands in despair, and frantically implored Martin to hasten and to save her unfortunate parent, at all hazards, from the dreadful fate which threatened him.

But soon every hope was banished, and the utmost horror was excited amongst all those who had hurried to that part of the hall in which the conflagration had first broke out, for on arriving at the foot of the stairs which led up to the chamber of Mr. Hawthorn, they discovered them to be in flames from the top to the bottom, so that all chance of rescuing the poor old gentleman was rendered utterly impossible.

Mrs. Bayford uttered a frenzied shriek of horror and despair on making this frightful discovery, and she immediately became insensible, and was borne by her husband (whose excitement needs no description) from the scene of immediate danger, followed by the affrighted servants, who were thus compelled also to make a precipitate retreat.

The fire soon extended itself to the other wings of the ancient hall, and its total destruction seemed inevitable, for every one seemed too much paralyzed with the surprise and terror of their feelings, to render any efficient assistance to extinguish the flames, or even to attempt to save any portion of the valuable property the fine old mansion contained.

In a state of the utmost consternation, and filled with rage and despair on behold-

ing total ruin so near at hand, the guilty Martin Bayford bore his insensible wife, surrounded by smoke and flame, from the hall on to the lawn, and he had scarcely done so a minute, when the whole of that wing in which the fire had broken out fell with a tremendous crash, and the smoke and flames from the ruins shot still higher up into the sky, while the destructive element with wonderful velocity, spread itself in every direction, and presented a grand, but at the same time most impressively awful sight.

Numerous persons from the surrounding neighbourhood had now congregated, and the utmost excitement prevailed, especially as the frightful fate which had befallen Mr. Hawthorn now became too certain.

Every exertion was now made to stop the further progress of the conflagration when too late, but with very little or no effect, and already the total destruction of Hawthorn Hall, formerly, and from time immemorial, the mansion of hospitality, might be said to be accomplished.

Mrs. Bayford was borne without delay in the same state of insensibility to the nearest cottage, but her husband remained behind to watch with feelings of despair the progress of the flames, raving by turns, and giving the wildest and most impracticable instructions.

All the guilty projects he had had in contemplation were thus frustrated, and total ruin had, at one fell swoop, rendered him one of the most wretched of human beings.

It was a terrible blow, and Martin Bayford was not the man to bear it patiently, and the terrible curses that at times he uttered, were quite frightful to hear.

It ought to have been stated that the nurse with the child of Mr. and Mrs. Bayford had escaped at an early period of the fire, and were now in the same cottage with Mrs. Bayford, to restore whom to sensibility every exertion had been made, but hitherto without success.

The flames were not extinguished until late the following day, when nothing remained of the ancient hall but a heap of blackened ruins, so complete was the work of destruction.

CHAPTER CXIV.

THE WRETCHED OUTCASTS.

WE will pass over hastily that which followed immediately after the fire, and bring the reader as speedily as possible to the concluding events of our tale.

Mrs. Bayford had received such a shock by this dreadful calamity and the awful and untimely death of her father, that for many weeks afterwards she was in a state of complete insanity, and was forced to be placed in a lunatic asylum; her husband never once visiting her, and appearing to feel not the slightest interest in, or anxiety for, her fate, but to be wholly wrapped up in the gloom of his own thoughts, as he found himself from a once state of affluence, reduced to complete state of beggary, with no means to extricate himself, and depending on the charity of strangers for present assistance.

Let us now imagine a period of two years to have elapsed since the startling events just recorded, and Mr. and Mrs. Bayford with their child, had left the neighbourhood in which they had formerly resided for some months, and no one knew what had become of them, though most persons felt the deepest commiseration for them, especially Mrs. Bayford and her child, and had rendered them all the pecuniary assistance in their power while they had resided in the vicinity of the late Hawthorn Hall.

In a wretched cottage, situated near a dreary forest in the west of England, and enduring all the horrors of poverty and want, Martin Bayford and his wretched wife and child, now resided, and how changed was their appearance from what it had formerly been. The once graceful form of Mrs. Bayford was worn and emaciated, her features haggard and careworn, and her eyes that once beamed so lustrous with joy, intelligence, and innocent affection, were now dimmed and sunken, and in fact, never were the dreadful ravages of care, sorrow, and long suffering from want, anxiety, and privation more fearfully portrayed in any unfortunate human being than her, and it was impossible that any one could behold so melancholy a wreck of what was once so lovely, without feelings of the deepest sorrow and commiseration.

And equally changed was the appearance of Martin Bayford, and it would have been difficult for any one to recognize in that wretchedly clad, coarse, unshaven, and repulsive looking man, the once handsome and dashing gay gallant and man of fashion as he was when introduced to the reader at the commencement of our tale.

The hut in which they had for some time dwelt, had once presented an aspect of comparative comfort. But then Martin, who had exhibited symptoms of remorse, and treated his unfortunate wife with some degree of kindness, had so far learned to

forget his former position in society, as to make a virtue of necessity; and settling himself down to habits of honest industry, had obtained employment in the humble capacity of a farm labourer; and his wife increased their scanty income by toiling for many hours a day at needlework, which she procured from the gentry and others in the neighbourhood where they resided, and though terrible were her sufferings both mentally and bodily, she bore them all with patience and resignation, never offering a murmur of complaint, or uttering a word of reproach to her guilty husband, who had been the cause of all their present misery by his former misconduct.

But this was not fated to last long, Martin again took to habits of intemperance, neglected his work, insulted his employers, and finally got dismissed in disgrace, with a character damned, and no chance of obtaining employment again in that neighbourhood.

It was then that himself, his wife, and child were again reduced to all the horrors of want, and must in fact have starved, had it not been for the assistance that was sometimes rendered by two or three of the humble inhabitants of a neighbouring village who knew them, and commiserated with the misfortunes of Mrs. Bayford, if they could not with her husband.

And now their humble dwelling, as has been before stated, presented the most wretched appearance, every article of furniture it had once contained, with the exception of an old straw mattress, and a couple of chairs, having been sold at different times to procure the common necessities of life.

Even from this wretched shelter they expected to be ejected every hour, for they were, of course, unable to pay any rent, and it was only surprising that the landlord had suffered them to remain there so long.

It was on the afternoon of a gloomy day about the latter end of October, that the wretched Bayford and his unfortunate wife and child were huddled together in their hovel for the sake of warmth, (for the weather was cold and bleak, and it was long ere a spark of fire had been seen in the grate,) and nothing could be more miserable or pitiable than their appearance, for they had scarcely partaken of a morsel of food for nearly two days, and they might consequently be said to be literally starving.

There was something truly awful in the expression of Martin's pale countenance, and his wildly glaring eyes, and it was evident that thoughts of the most fearful nature were at that moment passing in his mind.

As for his wretched, heart-broken wife, as she clasped her little one to her aching bosom, though occasional sighs were all that escaped her lips, she looked the very picture of horror and despair, and madness seemed to be fast taking possession of her brain; and even the most callous and flinty heart must surely have been moved to some feeling of compassion to behold her at that moment.

"I am a craven fool to endure this worse than misery," said Martin, starting to his feet, as a sudden thought seemed to flash upon his brain, and arouse him into action; "but, by all the infernal host, I swear I will do so no longer!"

"Forbear, Martin—forbear!" exclaimed his terrified wife, laying her hand upon his arm, and staring aghast in his face, the expression of which was now rendered frightfully unnatural by the excitement of his feelings, "what dreadful thoughts have taken possession of your brain, while your looks terrify me?"

"Think you," he replied, in the same tones as before, "that I will any longer submit to starve, while there is gold, aye gold, (such as I once possessed in abundance) to be had for the seeking?—I will not, this moment has decided me."

"Oh, Martin," said Mrs. Bayford, with increased alarm, "tell me, I implore you, what is it you contemplate?"

"Robbery!" he answered, in a determined voice, "since any longer to look for charity from the sordid wretches who have none in their hearts to bestow is in vain."

"Robbery!" gasped forth Mrs. Bayford, still looking at him with the greatest terror, and the word faltering on her lips; "oh, recal that guilty word, and banish such fearful thoughts from your mind. Better were it for us to continue to endure our present misery, if it be the will of Heaven that for a time we should do so,—better, much better even to die, than thus to plunge into crime, and——"

"Fool!" fiercely interrupted her husband, "think you that such whining cant as that to which you have just now given utterance can move me from my purpose? No, want has made me a desperate man, and I will not shrink from the task I have imposed upon myself, let the consequences be whatever they may."

The agitated Mrs. Bayford was about to make some reply, when there was a loud knocking at the door, and Martin, surprised, was about to open it, when it yielded to the force of blows and kicks, that were not very gently or sparingly applied to it, and Mr. Hardman (who was the steward of the estate on which the miserable

dwelling of Martin and his wife stood), entered, followed by two other men.

Bayford started on beholding them, and fixed upon them a look of the most deadly malice, yet scorn and defiance, while his wife trembled, clasped her hands together, and looked more ghastly pale than before.

Mr. Hardman met those looks with the most stolid expression of countenance, and perfect indifference, while his two companions, (who were miserable specimens of humanity), chuckled to themselves, and seemed to be rather amused than otherwise.

"Now then, Master Bayford," said Mr. Hardman, "I suppose you know the errand I come upon?"

"Yes," answered Bayford, in a tone of bitter sarcasm, "I know it well;—if I had any reason to doubt the nature of it, your villanous countenance would sufficiently explain it."

"Come, come," remonstrated Mr. Hardman, with meek forbearance, "no insolence, Master Bayford, if you please, because that's not business. You've got no money I suppose."

"No; and if I had, not one penny of it would I pay to you, unless I was certain that out of it you would purchase a rope to hang yourself. I would sooner spend it in the ale house."

"No doubt of it. However, short reckonings make long friends, and I am a man of few words. You've been living here rent free, quite long enough, but I cannot allow you to do so any longer,—I therefore, give you a receipt in full for what you owe, and out you go."

"Insulting scoundrel, dog!" exclaimed Martin, passionately, and clenching his fist menacingly; but his wife, who trembled with emotion, laid her hand upon his arm, and looking in his face imploringly, said:—

"For Heaven's sake, Martin, forbear; restrain your indignation; and you, Mr. Hardman,—add not to the misery of poverty by cruel mockery and insult. Have at least some pity for our sufferings."

"Pity," repeated the steward, "that's a foreign word I imagine, at any rate I don't understand it. But come, this is a waste of time, and mine is precious. I'm sorry to disturb you, but the best of friends must part you know."

"Alas! alas!" sighed the distracted Mrs. Bayford, "and must we be driven from even this miserable place of shelter, in our present deplorable and helpless condition, and on such a cold and dreary day as this?—I implore you, Mr. Hardman, again to let some feeling of compassion enter your breast, and suffer us to remain here, if only till to-morrow."

"Very sorry," returned Hardman, "but I couldn't do it, under any consideration."

"Flinty-hearted scoundrel!" exclaimed Martin, "were I to punish you as you deserve, for your brutal insolence, I should immediately stretch you senseless at my feet. Come, wife, sue not to such a hoary headed miscreant as this, but treat him with the scorn he merits. Take possession, crawling sycophant, of your master's dog-kennel, which I would no longer occupy, even though it were to shelter me from death. It may be yet your fate to have to sue to Martin Bayford for charity when your career of plunder shall have been brought to an end, and you are driven forth upon the world in disgrace. Come, Fanny, be firm, and let us immediately away from hence."

Mrs. Bayford burst into tears and hesitated as she took the hand of her child, but her husband, with a half muttered oath, took her arm rather violently, and fixing upon Hardman a look of the most ineffable scorn and defiance, conducted her from the cottage.

The steward immediately followed with his two worthy companions, and giving instructions to them to lock and padlock the door, he stalked majestically away, as though he had just performed one of the most important and praiseworthy actions.

Martin took the child in his arms, and his wife slowly followed him, for her enfeebled limbs could scarcely support her, and the anguish of her mind defies every attempt at description.

The expression of Martin's countenance as they proceeded on their dreary and uncertain way was one of stern determination, but he said not a word, and at length they entered a lane, and lost sight of the miserable hovel which had so long sheltered them.

The day, as we have before said, was bleak, cold, and cheerless, and the evening had set in with still more gloomy prospects, for a storm which had been long threatening, commenced, and there was every sign of its being a tempestuous night, and there must the unfortunate wanderers be exposed to all its inclemencies, and famish from the want of food, which they had not tasted for so many hours.

The heart of Mrs. Bayford sickened at the dismal prospect before them, and it seemed to be utterly impossible that they could long proceed without resting and receiving some assistance, which it was very unlikely they would, destitute as they were, unless Providence should interpose in their favour.

"Oh God!" at length ejaculated Mrs.

Bayford, unable any longer to control the agony of her feelings, "what a terrible situation is this to be placed in. Alas! what will become of us? Whither can we go?"

"It's no use grumbling," replied her husband, in surly terms, "for that will not alter it. Keep yourself up in the best way you can, and as soon as we reach the nearest town, which is only two or three miles off, we will obtain the relief which we require, or I am much mistaken. Curses light upon adverse Fate, I am determined that I will not tamely endure its frowns much longer.

Remembering what he had said a short time since in the old hovel, from which they had been so remorselessly driven, his wife looked at him with anxious suspicion as she said:—

"Martin, I again implore you to beware; I fear that the same guilty thoughts which you revealed to me a short time since still occupy your mind, and I shudder when I reflect upon the crimes into which they may hurry you."

"Pshaw!" returned Martin, impatiently, "keep your fears to yourself, and do not annoy my ears with them, for I am not in the humour to listen to them, as I have told you before. Is it not better to run any risk than to have to endure this misery?"

"Would to Heaven that I were dead," sighed the unfortunate woman, "and that my poor, innocent child might perish with me, for I see nothing but horror and misery, probably greater even than that which we have yet had to endure, before us."

"Enough of this," said her husband, for it only tires my patience to listen to you. Come let us make the best of our way, for the storm is now becoming violent, and we must find a shelter by some means or other."

Mrs. Bayford returned no answer, for she knew it would be useless, and might only serve to aggravate her husband, whose worst passions were excited.

She therefore exerted herself as well as she could, and with an aching heart and trembling limbs, she followed Martin on the dreary way, her mind beset by all those torturing thoughts which the utter misery and hopelessness of their situation naturally created.

But the principal anxiety of the fond mother was for her poor child, who was still borne in its father's arms, being totally incapable of walking, and almost in a state of insensibility.

The storm, as Martin had said, now

indeed raged violently, and there was every sign of its being an awful night, such a one as might well strike terror into the breast of the benighted traveller; but to the poor destitute, friendless wanderer must present a prospect almost as fearful as that of approaching death.

Ponderous clouds hung upon the sky, from which the lightning flashed fiercely, and the rain descended rapidly at intervals, whilst the repeated peals of thunder, with deafening sound which seemed to shake the very earth to its centre, and the howling wind, (for it had not at all abated), completed the horror of the scene.

Thinly clad as the wanderers were, they were quickly drenched to the skin, and shivered with the cold, and the sufferings of Mrs. Bayford and her half naked child may be imagined, but not properly described.

As for Martin, though he felt it most severely, and was almost exhausted, he bore it all with a stern determination, at the same time any one might have perceived from his looks that his mind was made up to the accomplishment of some fearful deed, which was quite in keeping with the horrors of the night.

And still through all the terrors of the storm, and without the least prospects of relief, the wretched outcasts proceeded, and the lips of the poor sufferer, Mrs. Bayford, uttered not a word of complaint, although her heart at the same time seemed ready to break.

CHAPTER CXV.

THE CRISIS APPROACHES.

THE dreary lane they were traversing seemed to be of almost interminable length, and two or three times Mrs. Bayford was compelled to pause, and felt as though she must e'en lay herself down and die, such was her exhausted condition, but her husband would then turn round to her savagely, and with an oath, and chide her for her tardiness, and his looks were of that fearful and threatening nature that she trembled to meet them, and again would she make a desperate effort, and struggle on.

At length they reached the end of the lane, and emerged upon a scene, if possible, still more dreary, and where they were more exposed to the weather; for the trees which overshadowed the lane, had hitherto partly sheltered them from the rain, which still poured down in torrents.

Mrs. Bayford was again compelled to

pause, for her limbs almost refused to perform their office, and the sickness of death was upon her heart.

Her husband, whose looks and demeanour became more brutal every moment, turned upon her with a frown, and, after muttering an oath between his teeth, he again upbraided her for her delay, and in language the most unnatural, commanded her to proceed, unless she wished that they should be all night exposed to the fury of the tempest.

His wife looked up in his stern countenance, with an expression which was sufficient to move even the most insensible being to pity, in a voice which was so faint that it was scarcely audible, she said:—

"Alas! Martin, how can you speak thus unkindly to me under these dreadful circumstances?—Heaven knows how anxious I am to exert myself to the last moment, for the sake of yourself and our poor child, but nature is nearly exhausted, and I feel that it is impossible for me to proceed much farther."

"Nonsense!" said the unfeeling man, "I tell you again you must persevere; have I not, and do I not suffer as much as yourself, and yet you do not hear me complain, and I have got this burthen to carry too. Psha! it is all obstinacy or affectation, and I have no patience."

"Heaven help me, then," said Mrs. Bayford, "for I see that you to whom I ought to look for sympathy and support, have none to bestow upon me."

"So, you reproach me, then?" said Martin, with a savage look; "but is this the time for doing so, I would ask you? Moreover, my temper is now none of the best; so you may as well not seek to cross me."

"Martin," she returned, "you have no cause to upbraid me, or to accuse me of acting in any way towards you, but as my sense of duty dictates. Yes, I—I will persevere; and, should my strength fail me, leave me, if you will, to perish on the road, but oh, I implore you to see to the safety of our innocent offspring."

"There, let's have no more of these dismal exhortations, but let us at once proceed."

"Whither can we go?"

"I have told you, to the nearest town, which is now not far off."

"And what hope of relief have we there, penniless and wretched as we are?" demanded his wife, in a tremulous voice, leaning upon one of his arms for support, and with difficulty dragging her weary and trembling limbs after her.

"There are those who know us in the town," answered Martin; "aye, and not only know us, but are under some weight

of obligation to us—the landlord of the inn, for instance."

"How? What mean you?" eagerly inquired Mrs. Gayford, with a look of astonishment and incredulity.

"What I say," he replied; "you must remember Miles Bradshaw and his wife, who were formally tenants of your father?"

"Yes—yes—what of them?"

"It is of them I speak. They are the present host and hostess of the old Blue Lion inn, at Eldersby, the town we are going to. They will—nay, they shall relieve us."

"Alas! alas!" sighed Mrs. Bayford, "that cruel necessity should compel us to solicit charity of those who may be so little disposed to assist us."

"Charity, be damned," said Martin, coarsely; "they are indebted to us, I say again; and now therefore is the time for payment, which I will not cringe and sue for like the veriest beggar, whom they would scarcely refuse, but demand."

Mrs. Bayford looked at him earnestly and sorrowfully for a moment, but made no reply, and they slowly proceeded on their way through a wild and lonely part of the country, the war of elements continuing with unabated fury.

Suddenly, as they were about to enter upon the high road, which they had now gained, Mrs. Bayford grasped the arm of her husband, and uttered a faint exclamation of terror.

"What's the matter?" he abruptly demanded, and in no very agreeable tones, "what is it that alarms you now?"

"Look! look! Martin," she answered, in tremulous accents, and pointing towards a blasted oak which stood near the entrance to the road; "do you not see that form? yonder it stands."

Martin did look in the direction to which she pointed his attention, and then as far as the dim light would permit him, he beheld the dark shadowy form of what, as well as he could distinguish, appeared to be a woman, of low stature, and leaning upon a stick or rather crutch.

He scarcely knew why, but a sensation of fear which was very unusual to him, came over him, and he stood for a moment or two, gazing stedfastly towards the woman, if such it was, and was irresolute how to act; while his wife still remained in the same attitude, and pointing towards her.

"What mockery is this?" at length said Martin, arousing himself, and advancing a step or two towards the form which had so suddenly appeared to them; "I will satisfy myself who this stranger is, and what

purpose brings her hither, for I am not to be easily intimidated."

Mrs. Bayford trembled and hesitated, and seemed to have some instinctive foreboding of what was about to happen. But her husband, apparently ashamed of the momentary fear which he had suffered to steal over him, and his animosity being excited to the utmost degree, he approached nearer the spot on which the woman was standing, and who did not offer to move or change her attitude in the least, but seemed to have her eyes fixed stedfastly upon him.

And now the vivid flashes of lightning played repeatedly about her, and revealed not only her form but features distinctly, and Martin and his wife started back with the greatest surprise and alarm on recognizing once more the well known and forbidding features of Wandering Jenny, (who although several years had elapsed since they first beheld her,) seemed not to be changed in the least in personal appearance by time.

Her bright and unnatural looking eyes were fixed with a strange and disagreeable expression upon the countenance of Martin, who, in spite of all his efforts could not but feel an almost unaccountable sensation of fear in her presence, and hesitated before he ventured to address her, which he at length did.

"Now, beldame," he said, assuming as much firmness as he could, "what brings you before us again after the lapse of so many years? what is your business with me, I say? Would you once more seek to alarm my wife, as you did on a former occasion, with your wild and ridiculous prophecies?"

"My business is more with you, Martin Bayford," replied the singular being, and there was that in the look she fixed upon him which made him shudder; "and you may not treat it scornfully, for what I am about to utter is the truth, and your own conscience cannot deny it. And you, unhappy woman, whose happiness and prosperity have been sacrificed to one so unworthy of you, and who never possessed your love; oh well may you have cause to tremble, for the crisis of your fate is approaching, and the former prediction of Wandering Jenny is about to be fulfilled."

"Daring impostor!" said the enraged, but still half terrified Martin Bayford, "begone, and dare not to insult our ears with your wild and ignorant prophecies"

"Back! back! fool! villain!" cried the old woman in a loud and discordant voice, "and dare not to move till you have heard that which I am about to reveal. Listen:—

" 'Tis coming, 'tis coming, the hour is nigh,
When justice the guilty shall not deny;
When the fearful past, so long concealed,
To mortal ears shall be revealed.
And the gibbet shall claim its right,
And the murderer swing in the morning's
light;
And who that murderer shall be,
Guilty Bayford knows! his wife will see! "

A piercing shriek escaped the lips of the terrified and distracted Mrs. Bayford, and she sunk insensible on the damp earth.

Martin stood appalled, and unable to move a limb, or to utter a sound, and Wandering Jenny, still keeping her eyes rivetted upon him with a look of malicious triumph, slowly retreated from the spot where she had been standing, until she got to a short distance from the withered tree, when she averted her gaze, and quickening her pace, was almost immediately lost to sight in the darkness beyond.

CHAPTER CXVI.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

FOR a minute or two the faculties of Martin Bayford seemed suspended, and he stood paralyzed to the spot, (the strange and fearful prediction of Wandering Jenny still seeming to vibrate in his ears), and gazing vacantly in the direction which she had taken, but without being able to discover anything of her in the impenetrable darkness which prevailed.

He could best have said why the words of the mysterious woman should have so extraordinary and powerful an effect upon him, convulsing every limb, making his eyes glare wildly in their sockets, turning ghastly pale his cheeks, and causing large drops of perspiration to stand upon his quivering temples; but so it was, and the power of a guilty conscience seemed to be working its effects upon him.

"Fool," he at length muttered to himself;—"shall I prove myself the veriest coward by giving way to this emotion at the mere idle words uttered by a mad woman in the frenzy of her feelings? I despise myself for having done so, even for a moment. "And yet," he added, after a pause, "can I, dare I treat what she said, with indifference, or banish from my memory the awful, guilty past? It is impossible; would that I could recal it. But away with these coward feelings lest I should betray myself."

By a desperate effort he became again firm, and telling the child, (who during



this scene he had placed upon the ground, and who had been gazing at all that past with looks of terror—to follow him, he raised his insensible wife in his arms, he carried her into the road, where he paused and endeavoured to recover her, but with no effect, and he became bewildered in endeavouring to think what was to be done, for it seemed quite impossible that he could convey her to the town which was still some distance off.

He uttered curses loud and deep against the late events which had been the cause of this, and might be productive of so much future evil, and for a few minutes he remained in the same state of excitement, and lost and bewildered what to do.

While he thus stood, the tinkling sound of small bells smote his ears, and looking along

the road, by the glare of the lightning, which still continued to blaze across the sky, he perceived a waggon approaching, which he hailed as a fortunate sight in his present dilemma, for he had not the least doubt that he could prevail upon the waggoner, as he was proceeding that way to convey them to the town.

The waggon came slowly on, the simple and contented rustic appearing to treat the storm with the most perfect indifference, and whistling merrily as he plodded on by the side of his team.

Martin, who was quite exhausted, and looked the very picture of misery, had fixed himself with his back against a tree, which grew by the road side, and the poor child had laid hold of one of the skirts of his coat with her tiny hand, and was gazing up at

the pale face of her mother, with looks of bewilderment and fear.

And this was the melancholy picture the unfortunate wanderers formed, when the waggon came up, and the waggoner beheld them.

Simple and ignorant, still the poor fellow possessed a kind heart, and he was immediately and deeply touched by the miserable appearance of the group before him.

Stopping his horses, he walked up to Martin, and gazed at him, and his wife, and child alternately for a moment or two with looks of the deepest compassion.

"Why, I zay measter," he at length said, "you do look vary bad sure enow, an' that poor woman, who be your wife I reckon, do seem to be either dead or dying. The little an', too. Oh, dang it, it do mak' my vary heart bleed to see it, poor thing. What has brought you into this sad plight?"

"Misfortune, poverty," answered Martin, assuming a humble and sorrowful tone, the better to enlist the waggoner's sympathy, "we have been driven by a remorseless landlord from our wretched home, and have been wandering some time in the storm."

"Poor things, poor things!" said the honest countryman, compassionately; "but where be you going?"

"We were trying to reach the town of Eldersby," replied Bayford, "where we might probably find those who would be willing to assist us. But we cannot do so now, unless if you are going that way, you would lend us a helping hand."

"To be sure I will, I should be mortally ashamed of myself if I refused to lend a helping hand to my fellow creatures at any time, as far as my humble means will allow me. I be going to stop at the Old Blue Lion, and there I'll see that you be all well taken care of for the night, at any rate. So come along, let me lift this poor woman into the waggon, for I be stronger than you just now, and then you and the little un, bless its heart can follow."

Martin was about to thank him, but the waggoner would not suffer him to do so, and taking his wife from his arms, he lifted her carefully into the waggon, he then assisted Martin and the child to follow, and having seen them all comfortably "packed" as he called it, he smacked his whip, and the waggon again moved on its way, the honest countryman resuming his whistle as merrily as ever, and as totally regardless of the storm.

Martin when he found himself in the waggon, and safe from the fury of the elements, abandoned himself to the gloomy and painful thoughts to which the meeting with the mysterious old woman, Wandering Jenny, and the extraordinary words she had spoken, naturally gave rise, and the more he

reflected upon the extraordinary event the greater did his agitation become, and the voice of conscience seemed to goad him on almost to madness.

But he conquered his emotions as well as he could, so that he might be the better prepared to meet the recovery of his wife, which after what had taken place, he almost dreaded and he felt at a loss how he should answer or evade the questions she would probably put to him.

The waggon, like all country waggons, proceeded at the slowest possible rate along the road, notwithstanding the smacking of the waggoner's whip, and it seemed to Martin (who was anxious to obtain that refreshment of which himself and his unfortunate companions stood so much in need—as though it would never reach the place of its destination, but at length the lights from the inn, which stood at the entrance to the town appeared in sight, and five minutes more brought them to the door, at which the waggon stopped.

At that moment Mrs. Bayford recovered and gazed surprised at the situation in which she found herself, but beholding her husband seated by her side, and the words of Wandering Jenny flashed quickly on her memory, she fixed upon him a look of dread, and could not help uttering a faint exclamation of horror.

But a look from Bayford silenced her, and she endeavoured to stifle the emotions that struggled for utterance in her breast.

"Beware!" he said, "this is not the time or place for any ridiculous display. What we have to discuss must be talked over when we are alone. You understand me?"

Mrs. Bayford returned no answer, but she sighed deeply, and soon afterwards the waggoner, who had been into the house to speak to the landlord, and to make arrangements for their reception, made his appearance to assist them to alight.

This being accomplished, Martin took the arm of his wife—who wet, and exhausted presented a most pitiable spectacle—and led her towards the door of the inn, at which Miles Bradshaw and his wife met them, and viewed them in their wretched condition with feelings of the greatest compassion, but so great was the melancholy change which time, poverty, and long suffering had wrought in their appearance, that they did not recognise them.

"Unfortunate people," said Mrs. Bradshaw, "how greatly must you have suffered, exposed to such a storm as this, and so miserably clad."

"Yes," said her husband, "and it do grieve my very heart to see it. For goodness sake come into the house, and we will see what can be done for you."

"We have no money, not a farthing," said Martin, "therefore whatever you do must be in kindness and benevolence of heart."

"I did not ask you for money," returned Miles, "I do not want it, and heaven forbid that I should from those who look so ill able to afford it. All the assistance I can render, you are quite welcome to."

"Thanks, thanks, kind sir," said Mrs. Bayford, gratefully, and tears starting to her eyes, "the feelings your words convey, do honour to your humanity, may heaven reward you."

Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw looked at her earnestly, and with much curiosity while she spoke, for the tones of her voice seemed to be familiar to them, but still they did not recognise her.

The unfortunate wanderers were then conducted into one of the private parlours of the homely and comfortable inn, where a cheerful fire was blazing, and refreshments being immediately provided for them, of which they hastily but carefully partook, the next thing to be done was to change their wet and ragged clothes for others supplied to them, and then they returned to the parlour for a short time, while warm beds were being prepared for them, as rest was what they required as quickly as possible.

Mr. Bradshaw and his wife continued to gaze at them with the deepest interest, especially Mrs. Bayford, whom they could not help thinking that they had seen before, but where they could not call to their recollection.

"It grieves me, I assure you," at length remarked Miles, "to see persons who have evidently known far happier and more prosperous days, reduced to the deplorable condition I at present see you in. Surely you must have experienced some sad reverses of fortune to be brought to this."

"True," replied Martin, "myself and my wife have drank deep of the bowl of misfortune, and Miles Bradshaw, if his memory does not fail him should be able to answer to the truth of that."

"I—I what mean you?" demanded the landlord with surprise, and looking at him narrowly, "how know you my name?"

"Alas," said Mrs. Bayford, and tears started to her eyes as she spoke, "sad indeed is the change that sorrow has wrought in us, and I therefore wonder not that you should not recognise in the wretched beings before you the daughter of the late Mr. Hawthorn, of Hawthorn Hall, and her husband."

Miles Bradshaw and his dame started with astonishment on hearing these words, and the tones of Mrs. Bayford's voice, notwithstanding the time which had elapsed since they had before heard them, immediately and most forcibly struck them, and looking in her face and that of her husband still more

narrowly than they had done before, they at once recognised them.

"Goodness gracious," exclaimed the kind-hearted Mrs. Bradshaw, taking the hand of the unfortunate Mrs. Bayford, and looking with the deepest and most honest sympathy in her pale and careworn face, "it is poor Miss Fanny Hawthorn," (Martin frowned, and half muttered an oath between his teeth, which awakened the old woman to a sense of the mistake she had made), "I ask pardon, I'm sure, but I'm so taken by surprise at this unexpected meeting that I hardly know what I say. Mrs. Bayford, of course, I mean. Oh, dear, who would ever have thought at one time of seeing you in such a deplorable condition as this? eh, Miles?"

"True, dame," coincided the old man, "and I'm sure it grieves me as much as it does you to see it. The good squire, too, what a shocking fate was his."

Tears started to Mrs. Bayford's eyes, and she sighed deeply, as she reflected upon that dreadful event which, however, in spite of all the terrible misfortunes she had had to encounter, had scarcely been absent from her thoughts a moment since the time it occurred.

"Say no more upon that subject," said Martin, in an unfeeling tone, "for my wife has never ceased to remind me of it, till it has become quite sickening, especially when I have had so many misfortunes of my own to think of."

Mrs. Bayford sighed, and looked at him with an expression of gentle reproach, while Mr. Bradshaw and his wife could not help feeling surprised and disgusted at his observations, especially when they remembered that it was his guilty, abandoned, and extravagant conduct which had been the principal if not the sole cause of all the misfortunes that had attended them, and old Miles could not forbear giving expression to those feelings which that recollection excited.

"Ah," he observed, "it is a sad, a melancholy thing to see persons who were once so prosperous reduced to such a state as that we now behold you in. And when I remember how happy Mrs. Bayford was in the days of her youth, before her marriage, and when all went well at the hospitable old hall, I—"

"Old man," interrupted Martin, passionately, and starting to his feet, "do you seek to insult me, by reproaching me as the cause by my marriage of all the misfortunes that followed?"

"Hold, Martin," said his wife, alarmed at the violence of his manner, "calm your feelings, I beseech you; I'm sure Mr. Bradshaw did not mean to insult you, but merely to express his regret that so melancholy a change should have come over the prospects which once smiled upon us."

"Indeed," sneered Martin.

"True," returned Miles, "and pardon me, Mr. Bayford, if I cannot help saying as an old servant of the late Mr. Hawthorn, that I deeply regret that he should have had the latter years of his life made miserable by the cares and anxieties which it was impossible he could have foreseen it would ever be his lot to experience."

"What mean you?" demanded Martin, hastily, and frowning upon the old man, who, however, remained perfectly calm.

"Nay, Mr. Bayford," he said, "since you have put it to me so closely, and I am a plain-spoken man, not that I wish to wound your feelings, in the midst of your misfortunes, you cannot, I think, deny that had you been more prudent, and—"

"Damnation!" cried Martin, enraged; "have I come here to be schooled, and lectured and upbraided."

"Oh, forbear, Martin," said his wife, "give not way to these bursts of passion. And you, Mr. Bradshaw, for my sake, I pray you drop a subject which cannot but be so painful to myself and my husband."

"Well," said Miles, "I'm sure I should be sorry to say anything wrong, or to excite any unpleasant feelings. But the change in your circumstances is so deplorable that I cannot help expressing my regret. I'm sure nothing could be more cheerful and promising than were your prospects at one time; the death of old Mr. Chizzleton, his uncle, brought Master Martin a handsome fortune, though the murder of the the old man was most monstrous, and was involved in mystery which I fear will never now be unravelled, although I should like to see the secret assassin discovered and brought to justice."

An exclamation of agony and horror which at that moment escaped from Martin, attracted the attention of all towards him, and they were surprised at beholding him ghastly pale, his features distorted, his eyes wandering wildly, and his whole frame violently agitated. Mrs. Bayford was alarmed, and old Miles and his wife looked on with evident amazement and anxiety.

"For heaven's sake, Martin," said his wife, "what is the meaning of this sudden change? Are you not well?"

He returned no answer, but it was evident that he was struggling with some powerful inward feeling, which, however, he endeavoured to conquer.

Miles Bradshaw again looked at him narrowly, and Martin averted his gaze in some confusion, as though he feared to encounter scrutiny.

"Why do you not answer me, Martin?" again interrogated his wife, "what is it that agitates you thus?"

He fixed upon her one searching look, then replied—

"Psha, why are you so anxious? It was only a momentary pang: the exposure to the weather has given me cold, and—there that's all I can say about it; ask no more questions."

Mrs. Bayford obeyed, but still she could not help watching her husband narrowly, and the extraordinary agitation he had exhibited at the allusion made by Miles Bradshaw to the mysterious murder of old Jonas Chizzleton, filled her mind with the most painful and bewildering thoughts.

"Well," remarked Miles, after a time, "I am sorry that anything I may have said should have been the cause of any uneasiness to any one, so we will e'en drop the subject. You say, Mr. Bayford, that you are destitute?"

"And what then?" sternly and hastily demanded Martin.

"What do you intend to do?"

"I am undecided," replied Bayford; "I cannot get employment, and I scorn to beg."

"But still your wife and child must not starve."

"They shall not," said Martin, emphatically, and with a significant look.

"Pardon me, Martin," said the old man, fixing upon him a searching glance, "but you do not contemplate anything wrong, I hope."

"That's my business," answered Bayford, abruptly, "we must not starve, and we cannot live upon the air. I have borne with it long enough, but it will be my fault if I endure it longer."

"Oh, Martin," said his agitated wife, "I pray you do not talk thus. Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw, bear with him, and heed not what he says, long suffering and anxiety of mind have had, and no wonder, the most painful effect upon him; and at times he scarcely knows what he says."

"Well, well," said Mr. Bradshaw, "I do not wonder at that, and I'm sure I'm very sorry for both yourself and him, and the poor child, too, and anything that I can do to serve you I'm sure I will most gladly."

"Yes, that indeed we will," said the old woman, "and sorry I am that the daughter of the good and benevolent Squire Hawthorn should ever stand in need of the aid of such humble individuals as myself and my husband."

"Oh, thanks, thanks," said Mrs. Bayford, gratefully.

"Nay," said Miles, "I'm sure they are not required, especially when we know ourselves to be under so many obligations to yourself and your late excellent parent. But you had better retire, seeing how much you must stand in need of rest, and in the morning we will talk further upon this subject."

To this they assented, and after a few

more observations they were conducted to a chamber in which a comfortable bed had been prepared for them, and they were left to themselves for the night.

Martin said not a word at first, but folding his arms across his chest, he paced the room to and fro, apparently lost in the most gloomy and torturing thought, while his wife was in a state of mind of the most torturing description.

She thought of all they had hitherto undergone, and when she contemplated the still more gloomy prospects, if possible, before them, hopeless, destitute, and wretched, her heart sickened, and she could not help shuddering with an innate feeling of horror.

Then all that had recently occurred rushed upon her memory with overwhelming force, and drove her almost to distraction. She thought of the fearful threats her guilty husband had thrown out, the dark hints he had uttered, the last meeting and warning words of Wandering Jenny, and the strange excitement which Martin had betrayed on the allusion made by Miles Bradshaw to the murder of old Jonas Chizzleton, and the anguish and anxiety of her mind rather increased than abated.

She hugged her child to her bosom, and her tears fell fast upon its pale face, when she thought of the dismal fate which too probably was in store for it, and the many years of suffering to which it seemed so likely to be exposed; and in the agony of her heart she almost wished that it was dead or that it had never been born.

"Why do you not retire to bed?" at length demanded her husband in surly and abrupt tones, and fixing his eyes sternly upon her, "why do you sit there, indulging in unavailing grief? To bed, I say, for you will have to resume your journey to-morrow, and will need rest before doing so."

"To morrow?"

"Yes."

"Oh, surely you will not reject the kind and friendly offers of Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw, if it is only for the sake of our poor child?" said the unhappy Mrs. Bayford.

"I will not accept them," answered Martin, "neither is this the place for me to remain."

"Why, oh, why?"

"Think you I will submit to the insolence of this beggar born, who seems to take a delight to remind me of the past?" said her husband, "and you I could perceive perfectly coincided with his observations."

"Oh, Martin," she replied, "how much do you wrong me by those cruel assertions. Do I ever reproach you for the past, though heaven knows what bitter cause I have to do so?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Bayford, with a look of rage, "there you betray yourself, and reveal

the feelings of hatred and suspicion you have ever entertained towards me. But beware, or you may ever yet have cause to repent of your conduct when it is too late."

"My conduct, Martin," repeated his wife, in a voice of anguish, and tears gushing to her eyes, "oh, how have I merited such cruel words? What have I done, that you should hold out threats to me which I am a loss to understand? Have I ever while enduring sufferings and trials more painful probably than before has fallen to the lot of woman, murmured, or spoken to you one word of reproach?"

"You have," he answered, savagely, "and it is useless for you to attempt to deny it. But I waste words with you. To bed, I say again, with your brat, and let me no longer be annoyed."

"Oh, God!" exclaimed the distracted Mrs. Bayford, shuddering as she contemplated his ferocious looks; "that it should ever come to this! Heaven help me and my poor innocent child."

"Bah!" he cried, impatiently, and again pointing to the bed, and the wretched woman fearing to utter another word, or to offer any further opposition to his will, mentally implored the mercy of the Supreme, and then placing her child in the bed, laid herself without undressing, by its side, and abandoned herself to all the torturing thoughts that crowded with such rapidity upon her mind.

Martin stood for a few minutes by the bedside, and watched her with a stern eye, then throwing himself into an arm-chair in another part of the room, leaning his arm upon the table and resting his head upon his hand, resigned himself to gloomy and guilty meditation.

CHAPTER CXVII.

THE PROGRESS OF CRIME.

But in the dreadful state of mind to which such an accumulation hourly of sorrows and trials almost too great for human endurance had reduced her, it was impossible that the unfortunate Mrs. Bayford could compose herself to sleep, and she continued to encourage the racking thoughts which constantly tortured her brain, without being able to receive the least ray of hope or consolation.

When she took every circumstance into consideration, she could not help thinking that the crisis of their fate was approaching, and she rather looked forward to it with impatience and anxiety than dread, for nothing could possibly be worse than the sufferings to which she had for many years been subjected from privation and the brutal treat-

ment of her husband; even death itself would be far preferable to suffering such a lingering life of torment.

She shuddered to think of the course of crime and infamy, which from the dark hints he had at different times thrown out, her husband had determined on, and there were times, too, when she could not help suspecting that he had something more weighty and terrible upon his conscience than she was acquainted with.

These and similar thoughts kept the unhappy woman for some time waking, although she simulated sleep in order to deceive her husband, and to avoid his wrath.

Once or twice he arose from his seat and approaching the bed, gazed at her earnestly, and listened to her breathing; but seeming to be satisfied that she slept soundly, he resumed his seat, and again became lost in gloomy meditation.

Then he once more arose, and traversed the room with noiseless but disordered steps, muttering something to himself, only a word or two of which reached the ears of Mrs. Bayford now and then, but of sufficient import to excite her anxiety and alarm. Once or twice she could almost have sworn that she heard the word "murder" escape his lips, which was followed by a groan, and throwing himself into a chair, appeared to be suffering all the agonies of remorse.

The tempest that had raged so violently, had now greatly abated, but the rain still pattered against the windows, and the wind might be heard moaning dismally around the old inn, and amongst the trees that grew near it, at intervals, and that, if possible, added to the gloom and misery that beset the unfortunate woman's mind.

At length worn out with fatigue of body and anxiety of mind, sleep did come to the relief of Mrs. Bayford, and in its forgetfulness she did for a short period gain a respite to her sorrows.

She awoke suddenly, however, from the effects of some fearful dream, and starting up in the bed, she gazed anxiously, and yet timidly around the chamber. Her husband was not there, and surprised and alarmed in consequence, she hastily sprang from the bed, and again looked around her in stupefied amazement.

She went to the door, but to her increased surprise found it was locked, and that she was consequently a prisoner."

What could be the meaning of this? She was lost in fruitless conjecture, and the more she endeavoured to imagine, the more did she become involved in mystery.

She listened breathlessly at the door, but not the least sound in the house met her ears, and it seemed, in fact, as though it was entirely deserted. Her fears increased, and

it was to no purpose that she endeavoured to imagine what could be the meaning of a circumstance so extraordinary, or what had become of her guilty husband.

It was just the break of day, and hastening to the window, she perceived that the storm had entirely subsided, but that the weather was still dull and cheerless.

Then she again went to the door and tried to force it open, but it resisted all her efforts, and sinking in a chair she abandoned herself to all the agony of the conflicting and bewildering thoughts that crowded upon her brain.

Suddenly she was aroused by hearing a door below continually opened and closed again, and then a footstep ascending the stairs towards the room which she occupied.

She drew back a few paces, and her heart palpitated, but she was not long kept in suspense, the door was hastily unlocked, and Martin hurried into the room, his face flushed, and his features and demeanour excited.

She flew towards him, and fixed upon him an anxious and inquiring look, but could not speak, for she was certain that something extraordinary had happened, and she scarcely dared venture to imagine what the nature of it could be.

"There is no time for words," said Martin, in a hurried and agitated voice, "we must leave this place immediately, and that as silently and cautiously as possible. Awake the child, and let us at once begone."

"Leave here, Martin, and in such haste," said his astonished wife, "for the love of heaven what is the meaning of all this? Whither have you been? and what has happened?"

"I tell you again," said Martin, "that there is no time here for explanation, and that every moment of delay is fraught with danger. Come, quick, if you would not tire my patience."

"Danger," repeated his wife, gazing at him with astonishment and suspicion, "what can there be to fear? What have you done?"

"Damn you for an obstinate fool!" he replied, with a brutal look, "will you do as I command, or shall I leave you and the child here behind to meet that which is soon to take place, for I, at any rate, must away, and that, too, immediately."

"Alas," sighed the unhappy woman, "what will be the end of this? My heart shrinks with terror as I endeavour to imagine. Oh, Martin, I fear that you have committed some dreadful crime, which will involve us both in ruin."

"Enough of that whining nonsense," said Martin, sternly, and hastily snatching up the child, who still slept soundly, he silently led the way from the room, peremptorily motioning his unhappy wife to follow.

Cautiously he descended the stairs, his wife following, and trembling so violently that it was with difficulty she could do so. But all was profoundly still in the house as they proceeded, and Mrs. Bayford neither saw nor heard anything which could at all tend to unravel the mystery, no one yet appearing to have left their bed.

Having gained the bottom of the staircase they moved in the same cautious manner along the passage towards the back of the house, and Martin having unbolted the door, they found themselves in a yard attached to the back of the premises, which they hastily crossed, and unfastening the gate, they were at liberty.

Entering a dreary road, narrow and winding, immediately before them, and on either side of which grew lofty trees, whose branches forming a canopy above the traveller's head, rendered the place still more dismal, Martin hurried along without saying a word, followed by his trembling wife, and they had soon left the inn some distance behind them.

As has been before stated, the storm had subsided, but the morning was dull and miserable, for the wind blew bleak and cold, and Mrs. Bayford felt it the more keenly from the wretched state of her mind, and not having yet recovered from the effects of the fatigue she had undergone the previous day, and the awful weather to which she had been exposed. But still every other thought and feeling was absorbed in the terrible fears that agitated her mind, as to that of which her misguided husband had been guilty, and which had caused such a precipitate retreat from the inn, and it seemed quite uncertain when her doubts and suspicions would be removed.

Weak and ill as she was, however, Martin seemed to have no other consideration but to make his escape from the neighbourhood as quick as he could, and taking her hand, he hurried her along totally regardless of what she must naturally suffer from such exertion and excitement. Fear seemed to urge him on, and he every now and then looked anxiously back as though he feared that some one was following him.

Every step that the wretched Mrs. Bayford proceeded in this torturing state of suspense, added to her fears, and yet such were the threatening looks that her husband every now and then fixed upon her, that she feared at present to question him further.

Arrived at the end of the road, they crossed a large field, and then entered upon a still more secluded and dismal part of the country than that which they had recently been traversing, and where there were no signs of a human being or habitation to be seen.

And here Mrs. Bayford was compelled to

pause from complete exhaustion, and which elicited a fearful oath from the guilty Martin, who evidently did not consider himself sufficiently beyond the reach of danger, and trembled at the delay.

"'Tis useless, Martin," said his wife, "my trembling limbs will not permit me to proceed farther till I have rested myself."

"'Tis your obstinacy and determination to annoy me all you can that induces you to refuse," replied the brutal husband.

"Oh," sighed his wife, "this is cruel, have you no feeling for my wretched situation? But why this precipitation? Why have you thus abruptly hurried me away from the inn, and what have you done that you should cause that alarm which you evidently experience?"

"That which poverty urged me to," he replied, "but which your scruples would have prevented me doing. We have borne the miseries of destitution too long, but by one bold venture I have extracted us from our difficulties, and I have sufficient for our wants for some time to come, if not to put us in a future comfortable position. We will leave the country, and then—"

"Martin," interrupted his wife, with a look of terror, "your words confirm my suspicions—you have committed robbery."

"Well," said the guilty man, "you have guessed the secret so I may as well confess it. Miles Bradshaw no doubt enriched his coffers in the service of your father, and I dare say was not very particular as to the means by which he did so, and so in retaliation, I have taken the liberty of compelling him to refund a little for my benefit."

"Miles Bradshaw," repeated his wife, "that good old man who was ready to assist us all in his power. Oh, shame, guilty man, I tremble now to look at you."

"Psha, I want no idle cant," he replied, "poverty has made me reckless, so I have taken that which I scorned to receive from the hand of charity, especially from one who formerly stood in the character of a menial."

"Away," said his disgusted wife, "I will never again acknowledge a thief for my husband; nay, perhaps a murderer!"

"Murderer!" gasped forth Martin, turning ghastly pale, "on your life repeat not that word. Who lives there now to accuse me of that crime?"

"Is not the blood of poor old Miles Bradshaw upon your guilty conscience?" said the horror struck Mrs. Bayford.

"No, no," he said, looking timidly round, "I did not touch the old man's life, I merely secured a portion of his gold."

"It was a fearful crime," said his wife, "and one that I dare not think upon without abhorrence. Think you that justice will not overtake you? Think you that that All-just

God, whose laws you have thus so greatly offended, will suffer you to go unpunished?"

"Hush, woman," said her husband; "let us proceed."

"I tremble to accompany you," said his wife; "how have you indeed fallen."

"No more; my patience is exhausted," he returned, sternly.

He grasped her arm, as he thus spoke, having given the poor child to her care, and then hurried them both from the spot.

Still Martin led the way through the most lonely and apparently unfrequented part of the country, for they had hitherto not met a human being and it seemed as if he could not well have selected a better route to escape detection, of which his observations and manners had shown that he was in the utmost dread.

The weather continued cold and cheerless, and it appeared likely that it would not be long before another storm would break forth thus rendering the situation of the fugitives still more miserable.

But the mind of Mrs. Bayford was too much agitated by the fearful thoughts that now crowded upon it to suffer her to take any particular heed of the weather, and those feelings became more intense and insupportable the farther they proceeded on their way.

They had now been walking for about a couple of hours, and had got to some considerable distance from the inn, so that the fears of Martin seemed to decrease, and he slackened his speed, for the first time appearing to take the exhausted state of his unfortunate wife and child into consideration, and who it was quite clear could not possibly proceed any great distance farther without resting.

Mrs. Bayford, however, complained not, in fact her heart was too full to suffer her to speak, and she dreaded to incur the wrath of her guilty husband by any observations her feelings might prompt her to make use of to him.

After walking in this manner for about a quarter of an hour longer, they emerged from the lonely part of the country they had been travelling through, and came upon a foot-path which led across some fields, and beyond which the smoke which rose above the trees convinced them were some human dwellings.

And here Martin stopped, and with looks half threatening, cautioned his unhappy wife as to the manner in which she was to conduct herself to prevent suspicion. She returned no answer, and they again proceeded, and having traversed the fields they came in sight of a small village, in which a few of the inhabitants were to be seen about, who appeared to take but little notice of them, which inspired Martin with some degree of confidence.

Mrs. Bayford, however, had her fears which she did not think proper to communicate to her husband, and she therefore followed him in silence to a small tavern which they entered about the centre of the village, and making their way to a room which they saw at the end of a passage, and where at that time of the morning they were not likely to find any one, which proved to be the case.

Martin having again in a whisper cautioned his wife as to the manner in which she was to behave herself, summoned the landlord—who did not seem to eye them with very agreeable looks—ordered some refreshment, which he paid for in a trifling silver coin, which he had secured from the other portion of his ill-gotten booty, and the host then retired from the room, having again looked at them suspiciously, probably thinking that the respectable character of his house was at stake by harbouring vagrants, as he no doubt concluded them to be.

"Come," said Martin, when the landlord was gone, "eat, and then we must again be gone, for I do not like the looks which that man fixed upon us, and we may not be safe in tarrying here."

"Oh, Martin," she replied, "how terrible is the situation in which we are placed, and the horror of which is increased by the crime of which you have been guilty. I feel a dreadful presentiment that the climax of our fate is at hand, and that it is useless to attempt to avert it. Would that we were dead."

"Cease," exclaimed Martin, fiercely, "if you would not excite my utmost wrath. Eat, I say again, and then let us away."

"I cannot eat; I dare not partake of that which is purchased by the proceeds of crime."

"Idiot!" he exclaimed, in a loud voice, forgetting the precaution which was necessary, "be more guarded in your words and conduct, or you may betray me."

Mrs. Bayford was about to make some reply, when the landlord abruptly entered the room, to the confusion and alarm of Bayford, who imagined from his looks that he had been listening, and he hastily arose to his feet, unable to conceal his agitation. Mrs. Bayford trembled, and involuntarily clung to the arm of her husband.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" hastily demanded Martin, partly recovering himself.

"The meaning is this," replied the landlord, who, having to pass the door of the room in which Bayford and his wife were seated, had accidentally overheard the last words the guilty man had uttered; "the meaning is this I say, that you must quit my house immediately, for it is no place for idle, dirty vagabonds, and for anything that I know thieves."



"Thieves!" cried Martin passionately, and clenching his fist, while the terror of his wife increased to an almost insupportable degree.

"Aye, thieves!" replied the landlord, "you look more like that than anything else. So tramp, and that quickly, and think yourselves lucky in being permitted to do so; I do not feel certain that I am doing my duty by not detaining you on suspicion; I shouldn't wonder if we hear of some robbery before long."

The rage of Martin was almost uncontrollable, but it was exceeded by his fears, and quickly regaining his self possession, and concealing his real feelings as well as he could, he said:—

"Such epithets as those you have ap-
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plied are both unjust and unmerited. Poor, we unfortunately are, wretched, destitute, but still honest. However, as we have no wish to intrude where we are not welcome, we will leave your house and proceed on our way, although we are but ill able to do so."

This speech, although it was spoken in the most plausible manner made very little impression upon the landlord, who, in fact, was not one of the most humane of individuals; and Martin taking the arm of his wife, who trembled violently, quitted the house, and conducted her from it as fast as he could, fearful of the consequences of every moment's delay, especially as the suspicious host followed them to the door, and watched them narrowly as they proceeded along the road.

CHAPTER CXVIII.

THE TALE OF DAME MALVERN CONCLUDED.

THE situation of Mrs. Bayford was now more truly painful than ever, for the little strength she had had remaining was completely exhausted, and she felt as if she could every moment drop down in the road and die. Had it not been for the support of her husband, in fact, who almost carried her, she could not have proceeded any distance; and the fears of Martin, especially after what had just occurred, and the observations of the suspicious landlord may be readily imagined.

Fearful curses frequently escaped the guilty man's lips, which added to the agitation of his ill-fated wife, and increased the disgust and abhorrence she could not now help feeling towards him.

But more particularly were her feelings of anguish and anxiety exerted for her helpless child, who clung to her side, looking up mournfully in her pale and careworn face, with an expression of sympathy that was wonderful in one so young. She wept not, she murmured not, and her patient endurance of such unparalleled sufferings, was almost incredible. Alas! what would become of that unfortunate little one if left alone in the wide world, dependent on the pity and charity of strangers? This thought was madness to the wretched mother, and scalding tears of anguish chased each other down her cheeks, which Martin beheld without pity, his whole care and anxiety being for his own safety, which he now saw with all the cowardice of guilt, was so greatly imperilled.

And now to add to the horror and utter hopelessness of their situation, the storm which had been threatening for some time, recommenced with the greatest violence, and rendered it almost impossible for them to stand up against its fury.

Where could they find a place of shelter? and even if they could do so, had they not everything to fear from the danger of delay? The robbery which Martin had committed, and which had been accompanied by the most brutal violence, had doubtless long since been discovered, and a pursuit set on foot; and burthened as he was by his ill-fated wife and child, he had too much reason to fear discovery. Bitter curses again escaped his lips, and once more he absolutely dragged his wife and child along, but all to no purpose, for their complete helplessness and exhaustion seemed to mock his anxiety.

There appeared to be but one chance of his effecting his own escape, and that was abandoning them to their fate; but there was something so truly monstrous in that idea, that even he shrunk from it with repugnance.

His distracted wife, as she looked up mournfully in his face, seemed to read the dark thoughts that were passing in his mind, and she held her child still closer to her shivering form, as if she feared that its wretched and guilty parent contemplated some dreadful act, which from the sinister glances he ever and anon fixed upon it, appeared to confirm.

"Leave me and my child here to perish, Martin," she said, in tones that were sufficient to make the most powerful impression even upon a heart insensible to the common dictates of humanity; "it is impossible that we can drag our weary limbs further through this fearful storm, and Heaven's will be done; 'twere better now to die than continue to linger on a life of misery that is insupportable. Leave me, I say, and look to your own safety."

"Bah," he returned, in the most unfeeling tones, and with a look which told sufficiently how little he sympathised with the unhappy woman's sufferings; "you talk madly, and only do so to annoy me. Our situation, I own, is desperate, but you must continue to exert yourself, and ere long we may probably meet with a place of shelter. Give me the child, support yourself on my arm, and we shall then be able to proceed with less difficulty."

Mrs. Bayford could not speak, for the power of her emotions prevented her, and her husband taking the child, she hung upon his arm, as he had suggested, and silently invoking the merciful interposition of the Almighty to rescue them from sufferings so awful; for the sake of her poor child she did exert herself in a manner truly wonderful, and they continued, though slowly, on their dreary and miserable way.

And now how bitterly did Martin regret the crime he had committed, and which had placed them in their present awful situation, when they might otherwise have been comparatively comfortable under the hospitable roof of the kind-hearted Miles Bradshaw and his wife, who had promised and were prepared to render them all the assistance in their power, to extricate them from that wretched state of penury and distress, to which through his guilty and abandoned conduct they had so long been reduced. Of what use was the ill-gotten gold he had about him?—Would it procure him, his unfortunate wife, and their tender offspring, the least relief? It would not; while the

ignominious fate which awaited him, and which seemed likely so soon to overtake him, appalled his soul to think of.

But there was yet another crime, (so hideous in its nature, that even the most hardened criminal might well have trembled at the thought of it), which pressed upon his conscience, with a weight so overwhelming that it almost drove him to madness. That crime had long been concealed beneath the dark veil of mystery, but he now felt convinced that the time was coming when it would be disclosed in the broad light of day, and that retribution overtake its guilty perpetrator, which he so richly merited but had so long escaped.

And as these torturing reflections passed in his mind, and the certainty of his approaching fate every moment became the more apparent to him, he trembled with fear, so true it is that—

“Conscience does make cowards of us all.”

Still raged the tempest with unabated fury, and still the prospect of relief and shelter to the miserable wanderers appeared as distant as ever, until emerging from the wilderness which they had for some time with so much difficulty been penetrating, they suddenly came in sight of a pile of ruins, which on approaching nearer they found to be those of an abbey, overgrown with moss and ivy, and having a gloomy, at the same time picturesque effect, as they were occasionally illumined by the broad glare of the lightning.

Trifling even as might be the shelter they could probably afford, they presented a welcome sight to the travellers in such a storm, and even the unfortunate Mrs. Bayford could not behold them without some degree of satisfaction, heartsick and restless, as she had now in her despair become, for there, at any rate, she might lie herself down and die.

They arrived at the venerable pile of ruins, which in their decay had there stood for ages, inspiring a feeling of superstitious awe in the minds of most persons who beheld them, and, in fact many were the wild and extravagant tales and legends that were current regarding them, and few persons who resided in the neighbourhood where they were situated, cared to approach them after nightfall.

But no such feelings as these were at that critical time encouraged by Martin Bayford, and entering upon the gloomy precincts of the ruins, he was about to assist his wife over the fallen fragments of stone that strewed the earth, and were almost buried in the lank grass and weeds, and presented so many impediments, when in the blaze of

the lightning, he thought he beheld the outlines of a human form, moving about among the ruins nearly opposite to the spot on which himself and his unfortunate companion now stood, and a trembling sensation of fear, which he could not resist, stole over him, as he paused, and grasped the arm of his wife, and held her back, looking, however, wildly yet earnestly, towards that part of the ruins where he imagined that he had seen the form which had so much alarmed him, though he scarcely knew for why.

Mrs. Bayford also imagined that she had seen the same object, though it excited not her fears in the same manner as it did those of her wretched husband, as if she were not deceived, she naturally supposed that it was only some unfortunate being like themselves who had sought shelter from the storm.

Again the lightning glared in at the ruins, and Martin looked eagerly in the same direction, but saw nothing, and he now endeavoured to conquer his fears, and to persuade himself that he must have been mistaken.

With difficulty he led his wife through the ruins, endeavouring to find some part which was not in so dilapidated a state, and where they might obtain a better shelter from the rain, which continued to pour down in torrents, and it was with the utmost caution also that he did so, for in spite of all his efforts to banish it, the fear of detection, even improbable as it was, under all the circumstances, continued to haunt his mind.

And at length he discovered a portion of the ruins which had not fallen so much into decay as the rest, and seating himself, together with his wife and child, on a large stone which had fallen some time before from the crumbling walls of the ancient edifice, he sunk into a deep lethargy of gloomy thought, in which all the guilty transactions of his past life rushed upon his memory with a terrible effect that frequently made him start appalled, and give utterance to an ambiguous exclamation, which took his wife by surprise, and aroused the most torturing apprehensions and suspicions in her breast, though she ventured not to mention them to him, or to demand an explanation from him.

Martin, however, amidst all his gloomy thoughts, kept his eyes constantly fixed upon the spot, where he had fancied he saw the form which had startled him on first entering the ruins, and those of his wife involuntarily followed in the same direction; but nothing for some time met their gaze which was calculated to excite any alarm.

The tempest seemed to increase in violence every minute, and as the loud voice of the thunder reverberated through the blackened sky, it seemed to threaten to shake the ruins to the earth, and to bury the wretched wanderers in the midst of them. But Mrs. Bayford feared not, for she had now become perfectly indifferent as to the fate which might befall her.

At length Martin suddenly started; and grasping his wife's arm, while a livid hue overspread his features, he cried:—

"Hark! did you not hear that?"

"What?" eagerly demanded his wife, and gazing with mingled feelings of dread and astonishment upon him, for his features within the last few minutes had seemed to have undergone an almost supernatural change, and his lips quivered, and his limbs shook convulsively.

"Did you not hear that dismal groan that came as if from the depths of some charnel-house?" said the guilty Martin, in a voice so hollow and sepulchral that his terrified wife could scarcely recognise it.

"Are you mad, Martin?" she said, "what nameless fears now shake your guilty soul, and fill your brain with terrible imaginings? I heard nothing but the fierce voice of the tempest, and——"

Before she could finish the sentence, a hollow groan, realising completely the description of the conscience-stricken Martin, smote her ears distinctly, and such was its unearthly and appalling effect, that she could not restrain a cry of terror, and fixed her eyes upon the front of the ruins from which it had seemed to proceed.

"'Twas there again," said Martin, in the same tone of voice as before, and grasping the arm of his wife more convulsively, while an indescribable feeling of horror seemed to agitate his whole frame, and his eyes appeared ready to burst from their sockets. "You must have heard it then, 'tis useless to deny it. 'Twas the voice of my murdered uncle, who calls for retribution on the head of——"

"Martin! Husband! if I dare still call you so," gasped forth his wife, and fixing upon him an appalled look, which seemed as though it would penetrate his very soul, "what means the frightful words you have just now uttered?—In mercy tell me?"

"No, no, no! I dare not," he replied, and the unnatural fire of madness was in his eyes that glared so wildly towards the place from whence the strange and alarming sound had seemed to proceed; "it would freeze the very blood within your veins to hear it. The crisis of my fate is approaching—the wrath of heaven is about

to overtake me, and—ah! see!—powers of mercy!—behold! oh, horror!"

Mrs. Bayford, with feelings of terror, such as it is impossible for any language to describe, did indeed look towards the spot to which her wretched and guilty husband directed her attention, and there beheld, standing in the blue glare of the lightning (her eyes could not deceive her), the standing form of a man, in old fashioned costume, the upper part of whose person was at first indistinct, but as the vapour which had concealed it gradually dispersed, and the lightning flashed more brightly in at the broken casements of the ruins, the ghastly features were clearly revealed, and to the appalled sight presented those of the murdered Jonas Chizzleton!

A cry of horror escaped her, and she sunk insensible on the earth!

The prophecy of old Wandering Jenny was fulfilled, the dreadful secret was at length revealed, the once beautiful and happy Fanny Hawthorne had become a murderer's bride!

When the unfortunate woman was restored to sensibility, she found herself surrounded by several rustics, who had been attending with every care that humanity could suggest to her recovery. She looked eagerly around the ruins; her child was standing near her with clasped hands and crying bitterly, but her wretched and guilty husband was gone. The rustics had been on the way to the village in which they resided, when they were overtaken by the storm, and were about to take shelter in the old abbey ruins till it should have abated, or subsided, when they were startled by a loud cry of horror, and before they had time to inquire the cause, a man rushed wildly from the dreary place, with the looks and all the appearance of a maniac, and darting past them with the speed of lightning, was out of sight ere they could recover themselves from their surprise.

The reader will need not require to be told that this was Martin Bayford, and he took his way, regardless of the storm, which raged fiercely, or whither he went, so that he might escape the awful phantom which had appalled his sight, towards a wild and desolate part of the country, not far from which the abbey ruins stood.

The villagers, thinking that some fearful tragedy had taken place from this circumstance, hastily entered the ruins, when they discovered the unfortunate Mrs. Bayford and her child in the pitiable situation that has been described.

All the terrible events that had so recently happened rushed with maddening effect upon the poor woman's brain, and

she raved wildly of the spectre, and the frightful acknowledgment indirectly made by her husband of the hideous crime perpetrated by his hands many years ago, so that the rustics readily believed her to be insane, and looked at each other with mingled expressions of wonder, awe, and commiseration, scarcely knowing how to act; while the poor child with heartrending looks, and sobs and tears, implored them to save her dear mother, and not suffer her to die there, and leave her all alone.

Mrs. Bayford overpowered by the violence of her frantic emotions, again relapsed into insensibility, and having with some difficulty elicited from the child the name of her parents, and other particulars sufficient to acquaint them with wretched and destitute condition, felt the deepest interest and sympathy in the deplorable case; and as the storm had now ceased they determined to convey the ill fated mother and child to the village with as little delay as possible, it being situated little more than a mile from the ruins, and where all the attention could be paid her, which the melancholy nature of the case so urgently required.

Fortunately at the very moment that they left the ruins, a chaise cart, driven by one of their neighbours was seen coming along the road, and the particulars being briefly related to the man, he required no other inducement to lend a helping hand by carrying the unhappy mother and her child (who was still weeping bitterly, and wringing her hands), in his vehicle to the village, and to his own house, (he being in prosperous circumstances), and having lifted them in, and one or two of the villagers following, they were about to depart when a couple of men, whom they knew to be officers, mounted on horseback, rode up to them, to make certain inquiries.

Seeing Mrs. Bayford and her child, from the description they had of their persons, they immediately recognized them, but were disappointed at not finding him, of whom they were more immediately in search, namely, the guilty Martin Bayford.

The villagers having given them all the information in their power, the officers galloped off at the top of their horses' speed in the direction which the wretched criminal had taken, and the cart proceeded on the way to the place of its destination.

The robbery which Martin Bayford had committed at the house of Miles Bradshaw, was of considerable extent, and was accompanied with such brutal violence on the poor old man, that when he was discovered in his chamber, which was a short

time after the precipitate departure of the burglar and his wife, he was weltering in his blood, from severe blows he had received on the head, and was quite insensible.

It was some time before he was sufficiently restored to his senses to inform the persons in attendance upon him, who the guilty party was, when intelligence was immediately conveyed to the proper authorities, with a full description of the persons of Martin Bayford and his wife, and the two officers before mentioned despatched with all possible haste in pursuit, but with only slight chance of success, as it was impossible to imagine the way they would take.

However, they accidentally hit upon the right track, and in a short time arriving at the village where the fugitives had stopped, and being induced to make inquiries at the inn, they obtained such information from the landlord as convinced them that their endeavours to overtake the burglar and his wife were likely to be crowned with success, and they therefore proceeded on their errand without the least delay; and what followed on their arrival at the ruins has been already related.

But to return to the guilty Martin Bayford. On his wildly leaving the old Abbey ruins, as has been described, he rushed on with delirious haste, uttering the most strange and frantic exclamations as he proceeded on his way, tossing his arms in the air, and looking vacantly around him, as if he expected and feared to meet some ghastly phantom or hideous form at every turn. Every faculty seemed to be suspended in horror, and the hardened indifference which he had previously assumed, entirely forsook him. Conscience had awakened him to a full sense of all the enormities he had committed, and the certainty of the terrible retribution that was about to overtake him, and which he was convinced he could not avoid, haunted his imagination at every step, and shook his very soul with terror.

He thought not of that hapless wife whom by his brutality and abandoned conduct he had consigned to so cruel a fate;—he thought not of his poor, helpless, and innocent child; every other feeling was absorbed in the terror of the doom which awaited him, and which it would be madness for him to attempt to escape from.

But still he hurried on, fancying he heard the voices of his pursuers in every breath of the howling wind, and the mockery of fiends seemed to vibrate in his ears.

And still as he dashed madly forward, he imagined he beheld the awful features of the spectre of the murdered old man still glaring upon him, and saw his bloodless lips

move as if to give utterance to curses on his head, and so great was his horror, and the frenzy of his despair, that he rent the air with his cries, which might have been heard for some distance.

Soon he had got to some distance from the ruins, and plunged into the midst of that wild and dreary scene which has been before alluded to, a fitting place for the perpetration of any deed of horror, and the gloomy aspect of which was in perfect unison with the thoughts and feelings which at that time crowded upon the unhappy man's mind.

Above, below, around, all to his disordered and affrighted imagination, appeared terrible and portentous with fate.

And thus he proceeded on the way which led to a scene even more savage in all its features than that he had been so hurriedly traversing, and still with no definite object in view, unless it was the hope of being able to escape justice, or with the mad idea of flying from his own torturing thoughts.

But at length, breathless with the speed he had made, he was compelled to stop, and eagerly and fearfully he glanced around him to see whether there was any one to observe him; but as far as his eyes could stretch, no human being met their view, and it appeared as though everything favoured him in his flight.

The storm had ceased, but the unfortunate man was drenched to the skin, from long exposure to the weather; his clothes were torn from forcing his way through thickets and other impediments, and altogether he presented a most pitiable object, the very picture of despair and misery.

Again and again he cursed the folly of his conduct in committing the burglary, by which he had exposed himself to all that he was now so justly enduring, and precipitated his fate. Miles Bradshaw had generously promised to befriend and assist him and his wife; he was certain he would have kept his word, and therefore must have been both a madman and a villain to be guilty of the crime, when he might have been restored to a respectable position in life, and escaped the horrors he now was exposed to, and those which too certainly were yet in store for him.

"Madman," he exclaimed, "and could I ever hope to succeed, after such a career of infamy? Could I think to stifle the voice of conscience, and to forget the horrors of the past? Oh, no, they must continually have haunted my memory, and sooner or later have brought me to my certain and awful doom. That terrible deed of darkness, which for so many years has been wrapped in mystery, must sooner

or later have seen the light of day, and the murderer have been revealed, to meet the just execrations of mankind, and pay the penalty of his crimes upon a public scaffold. How could a guilty wretch like me dare to hope to escape that dreadful punishment which is so justly my due?

At that moment the hasty sound of horses' hoofs approaching the spot on which he was standing, and apparently only a short distance from him, smote his ears, and startled him as though he had been struck by a thunderbolt.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "they come, the myrmidons of the law approach; they are close upon me, and how can I possibly escape? It is madness to attempt it. My fate is sealed. They will drag me to a dungeon, from thence to a scaffold, there to meet a frightful and ignominious death, amid the execrations of the surrounding multitude. Horrible thought!—Let me still make one desperate effort to preserve that life which is still a curse to me."

Away again the unhappy wretch darted with the speed of the wind, panting for breath, and with madness and despair upon his brain; but faster did the horsemen whom he justly supposed to be his pursuers, seem to gain upon him, and their loud voices calling upon him to stop, at length saluted his ears, and sounded like the knell of death.

He ventured but once to look behind him, and then to his horror beheld that they were within a short distance of him, and that to escape them now was utterly impossible. But still the wretched man, wrought up to a pitch of frenzy, resolved to struggle to the last, and continued his rapid flight towards a wood, which appeared at no great distance before him, hoping that there amongst its deep, entangled mazes, he might perchance elude them.

It was all in vain, and folly indeed to think to outstrip the speed of horses, and the officers having repeatedly commanded him to stop and surrender himself, one of them discharged the contents of a pistol after him, which struck him in the side, and immediately brought him to the ground, with a cry of agony and despair.

The next moment they galloped up to him, and dismounting from their horses, raised him bleeding from the earth, though he was not wounded mortally.

The expression of his features at that moment, in which fear, despair, and horror were mingled, was frightful to behold, and in spite of the crimes he had committed, it was almost impossible to help viewing him with some degree of pity.

One of the officers took a scarf from his neck, and bound it tightly across the wound,

as well as he could, in order to stop the effusion of blood, and then looking narrowly in his face, and referring to the description of the prisoner which he had with him, with evident satisfaction, he observed:—

"The likeness corresponds in every particular, and we may consider ourselves lucky in having been able to accomplish our business so quickly. Martin Bayford, you are our prisoner, though you have given us some unnecessary trouble by-the-bye."

"It is all over," said the unhappy man, with a look which told much more than language could have described, the excruciating agony which wrung his guilty soul, "my career of crime is at an end, and now comes the punishment which I have so long escaped, and which I confess I so justly deserve. But must I meet that dreadful doom which I shudder to contemplate? Must the once proud and wealthy Martin Bayford perish upon the gallows—die the death of a dog? Oh, horror! horror! will nothing save me from a fate so awful and disgraceful?"

"It is not very likely, and not very proper that it should do so," replied the officer who had before spoken; "but come, we delay time, and must at once escort you in safety to your new lodgings."

Martin groaned, but made use of no further observation, and having submitted to be handcuffed, he was lifted on to a horse, one of the officers mounting behind him, and made their way towards the town in which the gaol was situated, where the unhappy prisoner was safely lodged for the present, and the wound he had received, which was only comparatively slight properly attended to previous to his going before the magistrates for examination on the following day.

In the meantime the unfortunate wife and child of the prisoner were conveyed with all the expedition possible, to the dwelling of the driver of the cart; the greatest sympathy being expressed for them, and a medical gentleman called in, and every care and attention paid to the recovery of the former, but without effect; she still remained in the same state of insensibility as when she was removed from the ruins, and it seemed indeed doubtful whether she would ever again revive.

For the remainder of the day, and the whole of the night, very little change for the better was perceptible; and the professional gentleman gave it as his opinion that the system had received so severe a shock from long suffering that it was ex-

tremely doubtful whether she would be long able to survive it.

The news of the apprehension of Martin Bayford was quickly received, and it caused a considerable sensation, the sympathy for his ill-fated wife and child increasing every hour, and those who were able most liberally contributed towards their assistance.

Mrs. Bayford was, after much trouble, restored to temporary consciousness, but the awful occurrence in the old abbey ruins and the dreadful secret of her husband's crime, which was now revealed, rushed with overwhelming force upon her recollection, and she relapsed into her former state of insensibility, and it soon became too painfully evident that her reason had fled for ever.

* * * * *

We will now be as brief as possible in coming to the conclusion of this eventful tale.

Martin Bayford having undergone several examinations before the magistrates, and the depositions of Miles Bradshaw having been taken in writing, he being too ill to attend, after the fearful injuries he had received, he was fully committed to the county prison, to take his trial on the capital charge of burglary with violence.

During his imprisonment, he evinced very little anxiety for his wife and child;—indeed he seemed to shudder with dread, and exhibited every symptom of terror whenever their names were mentioned; for his guilty conscience evidently reproached him bitterly, for his cruel conduct towards them, and he dared not to dwell upon it.

There were times when his mental sufferings seemed to amount almost to frenzy, and he would utter words that made it appear that he had something more terrible on his conscience than was yet known, or than he had dared to reveal.

The day of trial came at last, and the greatest anxiety was evinced by all classes of society to hear the result, and the Court was crowded to excess.

Miles Bradshaw had sufficiently recovered to attend and give his evidence, which it was clear he did with the greatest reluctance, and that he felt keenly for the awful position in which the prisoner stood.

Martin Bayford conducted himself throughout the trial with much more firmness and propriety of conduct than had been expected, and it was evident that he had made up his mind as to the result, and was anxious to prepare himself for the dreadful fate which so shortly awaited him.

The wretched man was convicted, and on being asked if he had any thing to say in arrest of judgment, he replied that he had

not, that he acknowledged his guilt, and that the sentence which was about to be passed upon him was a just one, at the same time exonerating his wife in the most solemn manner from all participation in the crime for which he must shortly suffer. He then paused for a minute or two, and seemed to be struggling violently, but at length, with a look of agony, and in a tone of voice which thrilled with horror to the heart of every individual in the Court, he confessed himself to be the secret assassin of his uncle, Jonas Chizzleton; and thus the fearful mystery of so many years was at last unravelled, and the inhuman perpetrator of the hideous crime was condemned to the gallows.

The day of execution arrived, and thousands of persons flocked to witness it. Martin died firmly, and was truly penitent; but when the last awful moment had arrived, and the culprit was about to be launched into eternity, a loud and unnatural laugh was heard near the gallows, and while yet the unfortunate man was in his dying struggles, an old, decrepid, ugly-looking old woman was seen to move away from the spot, forcing her way through the crowd, with a malicious grin upon her countenance.

It was Wandering Jenny!

* * * * *

Mrs. Bayford was never restored to reason, and she therefore never knew the dreadful fate which her guilty husband had met with.

It was found necessary at last, in consequence of the violent character her malady had assumed, to remove her to a lunatic asylum, where, in the course of a very few months, death mercifully put an end to her sufferings, and the long career of sorrow it had been her unfortunate and cruel lot to endure.

The poor little orphan child was received into a charitable asylum, where she was attended to with that care and humanity, which her truly melancholy case so urgently demanded.

CHAPTER CXIX.

STRANGE EVENTS.

DAME MALVERN had thus brought her interesting story to a close, (having omitted the passage relating to the execution of Martin Bayford), and she was about to apologize for its great length, when our heroine and her companion interrupted her, assuring her of the deep interest with which they had listened to it, and the strong im-

pression which the extraordinary and startling events it recorded had made upon them.

They had indeed followed the narrative throughout with the most profound attention, deeply sympathising as they did with the almost unprecedented sorrow and trials of Mrs. Bayford, and to give expression to which sympathy they were frequently compelled to interrupt the aged narrator.

"Never did I listen to a more extraordinary tale," remarked Phoebe, when the dame had concluded, "and had I heard it from any other lips but yours, my worthy dame, I should have been inclined to think it a mere fiction, the circumstances it relates appear to be so improbable."

"Alas!" returned Mrs. Malvern, "every incident that I have related occurred exactly as I have described them, and which are still fresh and vivid in my memory, as they ever must be, as when they were told to me, although so many, many years have elapsed, and I have met with so many vicissitudes myself in the crooked pathway of life."

"How terrible and unmerited were the trials and sufferings to which your mother was exposed, unfortunate woman," said the gentle Amy; and it is wonderful that her reason did not yield for years before it did."

"Most true, Miss," answered the old woman, "her fortitude and resignation were as extraordinary as they were exemplary, and have often excited my wonder and admiration, when I have been reflecting on the strange and melancholy incidents of her mortal career. Alas! that one so good and virtuous should have to suffer so severely. My wretched father too, (I dare scarcely call him by that name), how do I even now shudder when I think of the dreadful crimes he committed, and his awful and ignominious fate."

"Yes," observed our heroine, "it was indeed an awful punishment; but it is impossible to attempt to question the justice of it. But let us no more refer to a subject that must be so painful to you. It was a sad thing for a child so young as you say you were, to be left in the orphan state you have described; and I trust that you met with benevolent and humane friends to attend to your necessities, and to watch over your tender years."

"Thank heaven, I did, Miss Phoebe," replied the dame; "I have informed you that through the interest and exertions of strangers, but those whose hearts would not suffer them to do otherwise than to sympathize with me, I was received into a charitable institution, where I was treated



with every kindness, and properly and carefully instructed, for which to the latest hour of my existence I must ever feel grateful. Miles Bradshaw and his wife frequently visited me, and ever behaved to me with almost the same affection as if they had been my own parents. When the time arrived for my leaving the asylum, I found another in their house, where they treated me in every respect in the same manner as if I had been their daughter, always carefully avoiding any allusion to the dismal history of my parents, I remained with them till their death, when they left me an ample provision they having no children of their own. Soon afterwards myself and Mr. Malvern, who was a young naval officer became acquainted with each other, and a mutual attachment sprang up between us. We were married,

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and passed many years of uninterrupted happiness together. But he died in the service of his country, and from that time misfortune followed misfortune in such rapid succession, that I was reduced to a state of poverty, and was glad to obtain a menial situation in a nobleman's family, where I continued for many years, and until age began to steal upon me, and I was compelled to withdraw myself. I had, however, saved sufficient from my hard earnings with frugality, for the rest of my days. Of my subsequent life, it would be uninteresting to say anything."

Thus Dame Malvern having fully explained, our heroine and her companion quitted the cottage, and made their way towards the farm.

The old dame's tale had left a melancholy

impression on our heroine's mind which she could not readily remove, and as she and Amy retraced their steps towards home, she felt a depression of spirits for which she could scarcely account, but which would not suffer her to enter into conversation, and her fair companion, in fact, was also in no humour for the same.

They therefore sauntered leisurely on their way, indulging in the thoughts that beset their minds, and maintaining a melancholy silence which was very unusual with them.

It was a beautiful evening, and there was everything in the weather to animate the spirits and to tranquillize the feelings of those who were the victims of care and sorrow. But Phoebe was insensible to its influence, and as they slowly proceeded on their way, the melancholy of her feelings increased, and the most dismal and painful thoughts and presentiments of approaching evil continued to torture and bewilder her mind, and she tried but in vain to arouse herself, and to dismiss all such gloomy ideas from her brain.

They had now reached the old church-yard, which it was necessary for them to cross on their way home, and a trembling sensation of fear and awe insensibly stole over our heroine as they entered upon its silent and gloomy precincts; she hesitated, looked mournfully at her companion, who seemed to understand the feelings that agitated her, and to participate in them, and all the sad events of the past in a moment rushed so tumultuously upon her memory that they almost overpowered her.

She dreaded to proceed; she trembled with fear to approach her mother's humble grave—which they could not avoid—and every moment her emotion increased, and thoughts of nameless terror crowded upon her brain.

Amy, however, seeing the excitement under which she laboured took her arm, and gently urged her forward, anxious that they should emerge from the church-yard as quickly as possible.

The eyes of Phoebe wandered fearfully over the place where rested the ashes of the dead, and as the pale moonbeams cast a sickly and ghastly reflection upon the different grave-stones, she could almost imagine that she saw the grim spirits of the departed hovering here and there, or that she could hear their sepulchral voices in the evening breeze, as it murmured mournfully among the old trees that grew around, and whose branches overshadowed many a humble receptacle of the dead; and so powerful was the impression which those morbid ideas made on her that she could scarcely contain herself, and she almost feared to look around her, lest her eyes should encounter some

ghastly object, which her disordered imagination would be so ready to create.

Amy seeing her increasing agitation, stifled her own feelings as well as she could, as she said—

"Come, dear Phoebe, let us not linger in this dreary place; the evening air is chill, and we had better make the best of our way home, for we have been absent longer than usual to-day, and Henry may begin to feel uneasy."

"Oh, Amy," replied our heroine with a sigh, "I tremble with dread while I remain here, yet some instinctive power seems to retard my footsteps and to rivet me to the spot. It is long since I felt so melancholy and so wretched as I do at present. What can be the meaning of it, I cannot conjecture, yet I cannot rid myself of the torturing sensation which has taken possession of me."

"Let us begone," again urged Amy, "it will be impossible for you to rid yourself of these thoughts and feelings while we remain here."

Our heroine made no reply, and the next minute they stood before the grave of Phoebe's mother, faintly reflected upon by the moonbeams, which broke in between the branches of the old yew-tree, and where the wild flowers planted by the hands of poor old Mark Mayfield still grew profusely, and bathed in the dew of night seemed to weep to her memory.

It is needless to describe the emotions that now agitated the breast of Phoebe, as she knelt at the foot of her parent's grave, and clasped her hands together in silent but fervent prayer for a few minutes, while Amy stood motionless by, and watched the melancholy expression of her features with feelings of the deepest sympathy.

"Sainted spirit of my departed mother," she ejaculated in tones of solemn impressiveness; "if your poor, wretched, guilty, but penitent child still dare call you by that name, again I kneel upon the silent grave that encloses your honoured remains, and with a breaking heart, and scalding tears of the most bitter and sincere remorse, implore your forgiveness. Oh, that I could recall the fatal past, or make atonement. Could I but rest assured of heaven's pardon, here, even here, and at this moment how gladly how freely could I resign that life, which now has become so painful and so insupportable a burthen to me."

She paused suddenly, and seemed to listen attentively, as if to catch some imaginary sounds, while the expression of her features became more agitated, and her limbs trembled violently. Then hastily starting to her feet, in a tremulous voice, she said—

"Hark, Amy, listen, did you not hear? 'Twas there again."

"Dear Phoebe," returned her companion, alarmed at the strangeness of her looks and words, "what painful delusion have you suffered to take possession of your senses, and to agitate you thus? Arouse yourself I pray, you, and calm the fears that now assail you, and for which I see no cause. I heard nothing but the murmuring breeze among the foliage of these old trees, and—"

"No, no," exclaimed Phoebe, impatiently, "I could not have been mistaken; "it was the voice of my mother, speaking from the grave that smote my ears, and appalled my senses. 'Tis there again. Hark, do you not hear it now?"

"For heaven's sake, Phoebe," said Amy, still more alarmed at her wild observations, and the strangeness of her manner, "do not give way to these gloomy fancies, and let us at once quit this solemn spot, so well calculated to create them. You are not well, or you would not be thus affected. Come, come, let us away."

She tried to urge her gently from the spot as she spoke, but could not, Phoebe remaining fixed in the same attitude, and with her eyes gazing upon vacancy.

"Again those mournful sounds vibrate in mine ears," she said, "and appal my senses. It is the spirit of my mother that speaks to me and bids me to despair. And see, see! that shadowy form, that glides towards the old church, and seems to beckon me to follow—'tis her, 'tis her!—I recognise her pale features—I mark the solemn expression of those glassy eyes that now are rivetted upon me. Mother—mother! I come! your penitent child will follow you to death."

She staggered forward a few paces towards the old church—upon whose ivy mantled walls the moon now shed a flood of silvery light—as she thus wildly spoke, the astonished and terrified Amy following her; but overcome by the extraordinary excitement of her feelings, she uttered a faint cry, and her limbs failing her, she must have fallen to the earth, had not Amy caught her insensible in her arms, and so greatly agitated herself, that it was not without the greatest difficulty she could support her.

It was a strange delusion of the senses, and the more that Amy reflected upon it, the greater became her fears for her unfortunate friend, whose reason it seemed but too probable had become suddenly affected, and the most fatal consequences were too likely to follow.

But the situation in which she now found herself with the insensible girl, and so far from home, or the means of procuring assistance, was one of the most bewildering and alarming description, and she was completely at a loss what to do.

She gazed timidly around her, and her

agitation increased. She endeavoured to recall poor Phoebe to sensibility, but in vain, so painful was the effect which the singular delusion had had upon her, and it seemed likely that it would be some time ere she would recover.

She tried to remove her senseless burthen from the old church-yard, but she had not strength to convey her more than a few paces, when she was compelled to pause, and to rest the inanimate form of Phoebe upon the earth, while she watched her with the utmost anxiety, and every moment she became the more bewildered how to act.

Never had Amy felt herself placed in a more awkward predicament, and she was quite at a loss how to extricate herself from it.

But while she thus stood (the old church clock having just struck the hour of ten), she suddenly imagined that she heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and casting her eyes in the direction from which they proceeded, she caught by the light of the moon, a glimpse of the form of a man, who was making his way over the different graves, and between the tombs, towards the spot where she stood.

Her heart palpitated with mingled hope and fear, for she knew not who the stranger might be, whether friend or enemy; but the relief and satisfaction which she experienced, when on the man approaching nearer, she found that it was her brother, and that he was accompanied by two of the farm servants, who, having been somewhat behind him, Amy had not before noticed.

The protracted absence of his sister and Phoebe from home (especially after the attempted outrage by the villains Filcher and Beaufort, as related in a previous chapter), had excited the apprehensions of Henry, and he had therefore left the farm, accompanied by two of his men, with the intention of hastening to the cottage of Dame Malvern to learn the cause of their delay.

His surprise and agitation on beholding the state of Phoebe, and the excitement of his sister, may be imagined; and those feelings were by no means abated, when, in reply to his anxious inquiries, Amy related what had taken place. The strange delusion which had so suddenly taken possession of her senses, and reduced her to her present melancholy condition.

"Alas!" said Henry, in a voice of the deepest emotion; "what can this strange and bewildering event portend? What fresh trouble is in store for me. Poor Phoebe, I had hoped that time had alleviated the anguish of your grief, and tranquillised your feelings, but this I fear will be productive of the most fatal consequences, and which I cannot help shuddering to think upon. Come, let us remove the poor girl from this

dismal place, with as little delay as possible."

Amy made no reply, and her brother, with the assistance of his two men, conveyed Phoebe from the church-yard, and hurried towards the farm, at which in a few minutes they arrived, and every means were immediately adopted for her recovery.

It was some time, however, before our heroine was restored to consciousness, and then the anguish of her feelings at the recollection of what her disordered imagination had pictured to her in the church-yard, and which had made so powerful and painful an impression upon her, was such as to create the utmost alarm in the minds of Henry and his sister, and would admit of no consolation. It was in vain that they endeavoured to persuade her it was all a delusion; in spite of all her efforts to the contrary, she could not but continue to believe that what her imagination had conjured up had occurred in reality, and that idea gained strength the longer she encouraged it.

It was some days before she could regain any degree of composure after the shock her feelings had sustained, and then a deep melancholy had settled itself upon her, from which it was evident that it would take time and the utmost care and attention to arouse her.

CHAPTER CXX.

THE SNOW-STORM ON THE HEATH.

We will now pass over a period of six months, during which many were the remarkable changes which had taken place in the fortunes and circumstances of some of the principal actors in our drama of real life, but into the particulars of which it is unnecessary to enter at present.

Suffice it to say that the prospects of Phoebe and her friends at the farm had by no means brightened; for some weeks severe illness—from continual anxiety of mind, increased by the all but hopeless condition of her unfortunate father, whose fatal malady at times assumed so violent a form that he was compelled to be kept under the greatest restraint—had confined our heroine to her bed, during which time the constant excitement of her lover, and his sister's feelings may be easily imagined; especially as at times her medical attendant expressed but little hopes of her recovery.

It seemed to Henry Ashford that fate was entirely against them, and that those bright visions of future happiness he had ventured to indulge in, would never be realised; and such was the effect which those torturing thoughts had upon him, that there were

moments when his patience became exhausted, his fortitude forsook him, and he almost abandoned himself to complete despair.

To add to the anxiety of his mind, and increase the depression of his spirits, the prosperity that had hitherto attended him began to fail, and he had lately met with many sad reverses, and severe losses, that were sufficiently disheartening, and which he might have found it almost impossible to contend against, had it not been for the generous-hearted Mr. Stubbles, in whom he continued to find, as he had ever done, a sincere friend.

The commencement of what threatened to be a long, severe, and dreary winter had now set in, and cold and cheerless was the aspect of nature. Snow covered the ground to a great depth, rendering travelling in some parts of the country almost impossible, and a severe frost had continued for several weeks, causing the utmost distress among the humbler classes, many unfortunate beings dying from cold and hunger, and but for the charitable exertions of the benevolent wealthy portion of the community, hundreds who were thrown out of employment, and, with their wives and children, were left entirely destitute, must have perished.

We now call the attention of the reader to a wild and extensive heath in one of the districts of Yorkshire, in that dreary season of the year to which we have above alluded.

It was one of the most severe nights of that fearful winter, in the latter end of the month of January, and nothing could be more truly cheerless, and even appalling than the aspect which the heath at that time presented. The snow fell thickly around, and so piercing was the north easterly wind, that it seemed to penetrate through every pore of those unfortunate beings who were exposed to it, and to freeze the very blood to ice in the veins.

It seemed that for any one to attempt to cross that frightful heath at such a time, and at such a season, would have been to rush upon certain death, for it was several miles across, and before it was possible to reach any place of shelter (the nearest town or village being remote), they must inevitably perish from the severity of the weather, if, indeed, they could at all force their way to any extent through the deep snow.

Ever and anon, however, the moon shone brightly and myriads of stars twinkled in the firmament, which only served to make the misery of the scene the more apparent.

At first, as far as the eye might have been able to penetrate through the thickly-falling snow, no one was to be seen; but at length, as if they had risen suddenly from the earth, the forms of a couple of men appeared in the distance, forcing their way with difficulty along, threatening every moment to be com-

pelled to succumb to the almost insurmountable obstacles that presented themselves at every turn, but still struggling through all the horrors and dangers of that fearful night, in which it seemed utterly impossible for anything to live, with the most indomitable determination and perseverance.

And who were those wretched wanderers, who were thus exposed to the inclemency of that bitter winter season, on the fearful night of which we are writing? We will at once answer that question by informing the reader that those we have thus introduced to them in so remarkable and critical a situation, were the villains, Sam Filcher and Beaufort, whom we last left on their way from the awful scene of the execution at York.

And many were the daring adventures, and hair breadth escapes they had experienced, and the crimes they had committed since that period, which we shall not stop to relate at present (Beaufort being perfectly callous, and submissive to the will of the hardened and desperate Sam Filcher, and suffering all the horrors of a guilty conscience, and the most cowardly fears alternately), but come at once to the circumstances of the night on which we again introduce them to the reader.

It was quite evident that fortune had been very sparing of her favours to the guilty pair of late, and they had had to suffer many reverses in their "purfeshnul b'sness," as Mr. Filcher expressed it, which had reduced them to the lowest ebb, and even the usual volatile spirits of that facetious and worthy gentleman, seemed to have received a slight check, and his hopes of the future to be somewhat blighted.

Nothing could possibly be more truly wretched than the appearance of the ruffians on that fearful night—it was such indeed, as to excite some degree of pity in the breasts of those who might have seen them on that occasion, even if they had known the real villany of their character. Their features were pinched and distorted with cold and hunger—their eyes glared wildly with the ferocity of want and misery—icicles covered their grizzly beards and whiskers—and their clothes hung in filthy rags about their benumbed limbs, which appeared every moment to fail them, and to threaten to sink beneath the weight of their shivering frames.

Yet, in spite of all he suffered, and notwithstanding the depression of spirits under which he naturally laboured, Sam Filcher could not resist the temptation now and then of indulging in that low humour, which even in the most extraordinary difficulties, usually characterised him, and endeavoured to bear up against it as well as he could. But Beaufort was completely "done up," as the Sprig of Myrtle said, and the ghastly expression of

his features, showed the terrible mental and bodily anguish he was enduring.

"Vell," remarked Sam, after having breathed all the warm breath he could find upon his fingers, and buffeted his sides with his hands most vigorously, with the forlorn hope of imparting some small portion of warmth to them: "this here is preshus veather if yer likes, an' not no mistake; speeshully for gemmen whose toggery might be jist the thing for summer ventlilashun, but is rayther too light an' airy for the winter season. The vind's as keen as a razor, an' I only vish it vould *cut* as sharp, for I'm tired of it. Bless'd if I arn't von large hisikel, an' feels myself no vhere. This is the veather to sharpen a feller's happytite, an' I feels as hungry as a volf. Vot a misfortin it is to be hard up, on sich a night as this here; only vonce let me get to a fire agin, and cotch me leavin' it, that's all. I say, captain, vot a preshus hobject of misery yer does look to be sure. Keep yer pecker up—ve arn't dead yet are ve?"

Beaufort looked at the consummate villain for a minute, with a most bygone expression of countenance, and muttered an oath betwixt his teeth, which, however, only served to elicit a hollow, unnatural laugh from Sam, who still persevered most resolutely in dragging his frozen limbs through the snow, by the aid of a thick stick which he carried with him.

"If I could only get up a bit of a stave or a whistle," observed Sam, "jist to pass the time away, I should'nt so much care; but every preshus note is froze in my throat, an' I don't s'pose I shall hear nuffin more on 'em till the thaw comes on. I say, captain, this here's not exactly as it used to vos a few weeks ago, when ve vos up in the stirrups, eh? Fortin has been verry unkind to us lately."

"Curses light on her," growled Beaufort, passionately, and with a look of despair.

"There," returned the incorrigible Sam, "don't get out of temper, for don't yer see as how the veather tells us ve must take all things coolly jist now. Vy, yer nose looks as blue a bilberry. There, don't yer go for to attempt to vipe it, for fear as yer might find it in yer pocket han'kicher, as they does sometimes in Roosher, I've heard say."

"Cease this foolery," exclaimed Beaufort, in surly and impatient tones. "Can you venture to indulge in your low jokes in such a situation as this, and with even death in its most frightful form, staring us in the face?"

"To be sure I can," answered Filcher, "vots the use of being down upon it? that von't mend the matter, Kim along, ve shall get out of this here hobble presently, never fear—that is if ve keep up our pluck. Vorse luck now, better another time. But ye're

never satisfied; I'd hate myself, if I vos half sich a chicken-hearted feller as you."

"This indifference is well assumed, Filcher," said his wretched companion. "Your looks betray the real nature of your feelings."

"Gammon!" replied the ruffian. "I'm not down upon my luck so easily; though I must say as how I shouldn't not have the least hobbeckschun to pay my respects to a nice cheerful fire jist now, and a good stiff glass of grog by way of a reviver. I say, captain, how vould yer like a drop of hot brandy an' vater, eh?"

"Damn you for a fool," exclaimed the enraged Beaufort, "and myself for not having abandoned your acquaintance long ago."

"Ah," returned Filcher, with a sarcastic and malicious look, "no doubt yer vould have liked to do so if yer dare, but I vould'nt let yer. Our fates are too closely linked together yer know to be easily separated, so yer may as vell make yer mind happy an' contented on that here p'int. No doubt ve shall both go out of the vorld together, drop off verry suddenly when our time comes."

Beaufort fixed upon the hardened scoundrel a look of terror—which, however, made not the least impression upon him—and groaned.

"Of what use is it our struggling against the difficulties by which we are surrounded?" he said, at length, "we shall never be able to make our way across this interminable heath, and even if we could, we have no hope of any relief beyond it, guilty wretches as we are we deserve it not. There is nothing left for us but to resign ourselves to the awful fate which every instant stares us in the face."

"Stuff," cried Sam, impatiently, "I'm not a goin' for to give in in that here vay, yer may take my vord for it. Only let us get over this here preshus heath, an' ve'll find some place of shelter an' where ve'll get summat to revive us, or my name's not Sam Filcher. As for the storm, an' the vind, an' the cold, yer ought to be getting used to 'em by this time. There, rouse yerself, vill yer, an' don't be looking for all the vorld like a stuffed dummy. If yer vants a little hexercise, jist to put the blood into cirkilashun, I can't perpose nuffin better than that you an' I should have a game at snow-balls."

"Bah," exclaimed Beaufort, still more enraged, while the miscreant Filcher laughed aloud at his own foolery, and seemed to imagine that he had said something remarkably clever and witty.

The wind still continued to sweep with the same piercing coldness across the wild heath, and the snow descended in large flakes, rendering the progress of the wretched travellers still more difficult at every step, and the fate which must shortly overtake

them seemed more and more certain every minute.

The guilty Beaufort was the very picture of misery and despair, while his mental sufferings exceeded if possible, those which he was physically enduring. As the prospect of a horrible death presented itself to his disordered imagination, in still more vivid colours, all the crimes he had committed throughout his infamous career, were placed before him in fearful array, and his guilty soul shrunk appalled from the contemplation. Terrible indeed were the workings of his heavily laden conscience in that awful hour, and it was not without the greatest difficulty that he could at all contain himself within the bounds of reason.

But it was really wonderful to behold the fortitude with which the hardened and reckless Sam Filcher bore up against difficulties and sufferings sufficient to daunt the most daring spirit; and the feelings that he could perceive agitated and distracted the mind of his companion only afforded him food for the most heartless mockery and exultation; for the ruffian ever seemed to take a savage delight in torturing him, and treated his expressions of remorse with the most superlative scorn and indifference.

They had dragged on their weary way through the storm for some distance in silence, when Beaufort, who seemed to be completely worn out, and about to sink from exhaustion, was compelled to pause to rest himself, which elicited from the brutal Sam Filcher a savage oath, and he grasped his arm with a threatening look, which, however, had little effect upon Beaufort in his state of mind at that moment.

"Now then," said Sam, "ye're skulkin' ag'in, air yer? If yer stands there another minute, blessed if yer von't be frozed to the ground, an' then it vill be all up vith yer an' not no mistake."

"It is no use," replied Beaufort, "I am so exhausted, and my limbs are so benumbed that it seems quite impossible for me to proceed farther."

"Psha," returned Filcher, in the same savage tone, and still retaining his hold of his arm, "why what a poor miserable cur yer are thus to drop down at trifles, I'm ashamed of yer."

"If so," said Beaufort, with a look of despair, "why should you trouble yourself any more about me? Why not at once abandon me to my fate?"

"Not a bit on it, captain," returned Sam, with an ironical grin, "that here vouldn't answer my purpose; besides, I've got too much respect for yer, yer know. So pull yerself together, and let us push on our vay, somehow or t'other; summat vill turn up for us afore long, never fear."

Beaufort knew it was useless to say more, so he did endeavour to "pull himself together," as Sam had characteristically expressed it, and again they both slowly proceeded without the least prospect of relief, and their difficulties rather appearing to increase than diminish at every step they took.

CHAPTER CXXI.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING AND THE CONSEQUENCES.

There appeared to be no termination to that dreary heath, and even the patience of Sam Filcher was becoming exhausted, and his spirits began to droop, although he took good care to conceal his real feelings from the observation of Beaufort, and even at times endeavoured to hum the burthen of some flash song in his usual style, but every such attempt was a singular failure, so he at last gave it up as a bad job, and contenting himself with urging on his companion, in language not the most refined, but certainly from the threats with which it was interlarded, rather persuasive than otherwise.

Occasionally the humorous gentleman would pause to buffet his sides, and to get up a little extemporaneous hornpipe, with the hope of imparting warmth to his extremities, and putting the blood into freer circulation; then he would resume his tedious way, dragging his miserable associate in crime after him, with renewed vigour and determination, but without appearing to make any particular progress.

At length it almost ceased entirely to snow, and the wind abated, sinking into fitful and sullen murmurs, which fell dismally enough upon the ear, but was unaccompanied by those piercingly chilling effects from which the wanderers had previously suffered so severely.

The moon, too, now shone forth, and stars glittered in the firmament with redoubled brightness, revealing every object distinctly for some distance, but nothing whatever that could encourage the hopes of the travellers that they would at length meet with some place of rest and shelter for the night, and even if they should be fortunate enough to do so they could only hope to obtain the relief of which they stood so much in need from the charity of strangers, for they were completely penniless, and had not tasted food for many hours.

The storm, however, having abated, and indeed all but subsided, and the cold, from the wind having gone down, being far less intense, the spirits of Sam Filcher revived, and even Beaufort recovered himself in a

slight degree from the torturing feelings that had before oppressed him.

"All right," remarked the former, in tones of satisfaction, "the storm is pretty vell over an' ve shall have a fine night arter all. I begins to feel myself ag'in. So cheer up, captain, for ve must nearly have got over this confounded heath, and see those twinkling lights yonder, in the distance show signs of a town or village."

Beaufort looked eagerly in the direction to which Sam Filcher pointed, and did indeed behold lights glimmering in the distance, which seemed to proceed from the windows of some human habitation.

"Ve shall be as right as a trivet presently," said Sam, "I think I can smell the cheerful heat of the fire already, an' see the eatables an' the drinkables on the table."

"You promise yourself too much," remarked Beaufort, "and with all your boasted sagacity, it strikes me very forcibly that you will be most woefully disappointed."

"How so?" demanded Sam, hastily, "what cause have you to think that?"

"What right have we to expect anything, when we haven't a farthing to pay for it?" interrogated Beaufort.

"True," coincided Filcher, scratching his head, "that here is rayther awkward to be sure. Howsomdever ve'll get over that here difficulty somehow or t'other. My face an' my insinuating manners vill allus recommend me—"

"Yes, to the gallows," added Beaufort, considering it was his turn to be sarcastic.

"Hold hard there, vill yer?" said Filcher, "that here's a hittin' rayther too hard; howsomdever, I'm not a going to be angry with yer, cos yer see I'm glad that ye're in better spirits than yer vos jist now. Hollo, vot air yer lookin' so hard at?"

"Did you not observe anything in the moonlight yonder, Sam?"

"Not I. Where?"

"Near that withered trunk of a tree," replied Beaufort, pointing to the place he meant.

"Vot strange fancy have yer got into that foolish head of your'n, now?" demanded Sam; "I seed nuffin but the old tree, which looks for all the world, covered with snow as it is, an' in the moonlight, like some preshus hobbergobolin, as the old vimen tells us about."

"I could almost swear that I beheld something like a human form moving about," said Beaufort, still keeping his eyes fixed upon the same spot, which was a few yards distant from where they stood.

"The ghost of poor Jarvey Bob, come to thank us for visitin' him in his last moments, I shouldn't at all vonder," observed Sam, with a half laugh.

"Forbear," returned Beaufort, with a shudder, "recal not that awful scene to my memory. Ah, behold it is there again hovering about the old tree. It is a human being. Do you not see it now, Filcher?"

"Vhy, in course I does," replied the latter, "I must be blind if I didn't, an' it doesn't vant a pair of barnacles to do so. Steady, captain, suppose it should turn out to be some blessed indiividual vith the rowdy about him; that here would be a slice of luck, an' no mistake; for I should think that two on us might find strength an pluck enough to ease him of it."

"Ever thinking of some deed of villany," said Beaufort, looking at the desperate ruffian, with a mingled expression of terror and disgust.

"I'm allus a thinkin' 'bout b'sness," returned Sam Filcher, "and this is not the time to be so pertikler, vhen the hixchecker is kevide empty, an' ve're starvin.' But I do not see the form now."

"It has disappeared behind the tree," observed Beaufort.

It had done so, but Sam and his companion keeping their eyes rivetted on the spot, in a few moments again beheld it, and this time it was more distinctly revealed to them by the light of the moon than it had been before.

"It is a woman," said Beaufort, "some wretched, houseless wanderer, exposed to all the inclemency of the weather like ourselves."

"She seems to observe us," remarked Filcher, "and now she motions us to approach. Come, ve must know the meaning of this here, an' vot she vants vith us. Yer looks qualmish, captain. Vot's the matter vith yer? Yer don't mean to say as how ye're frightened of a 'oman, does yer?"

"No, no, and yet—"

"Bah, no hesitashun; kim along."

Beaufort said no more, and they advanced towards the stranger, she never offering to change her attitude, but apparently awaiting their approach with impatience.

The form was evidently that of an aged woman, and that increased their amazement that she should thus, unless she were compelled, expose herself to the horrors of such a night.

At length they stood before her, and to their no small surprise they recognised the same mysterious old gipsy sybil, who has so often figured in the course of our tale, and whom the ruffians Sam Filcher and Beaufort had encountered before on two or three occasions.

Her features bore their usual sardonic expression, and her eyes were fixed steadfastly and malignantly upon them, while she pointed one of her hands menacingly towards

them, her lips at the same time moving as if she were about to give utterance to some curse or warning.

There was something so singular in the looks which the old woman fixed upon them, and her appearance at such an hour and place, which excited in Beaufort a feeling of uneasiness he could not resist, and he awaited in suspense to know what would be the result of this unexpected meeting.

But Sam Filcher exhibited no such feelings, but, on the contrary, seemed to view the matter with perfect indifference; and, after returning the earnest gaze of the old woman with interest, he said, in his usual familiar and facetious style—

"Good evenin' to yer, my old duchess; I thought as how yer'd departed this blessed life long ago, but I'm glad to see yer alive an' kickin'. It vos wery wrong on yer, howsomdever, to wentur out on sich a preshus night as this. Arn't yer afraid of cotching the roomy-hattics? Vot may be yer b'sness vith me, eh?"

The sybil replied not for a minute or two, but fixed upon him a look of greater scorn and malice, her eyes seeming as if they would penetrate his very thoughts; but Filcher met her searching gaze perfectly unmoved, while Beaufort could not conceal the powerful sensation of fear, which, in spite of all his efforts to resist and conquer it, stole over him, and he awaited with no little anxiety, to hear what the mysterious woman had to say.

"You treat the gipsy sybil with affected scorn," she at length said, in harsh and discordant tones; and, addressing herself to Filcher, who listened to her with the same indifference he had at first assumed, and with a look of derision—"You would fain mock and despise her warnings and prognostications, although those who have had to listen to them, have never yet failed, sooner or later, to find them realised. Beware, villain, daring in crime, and blindly hurrying headstrong to destruction—beware, I say, lest that terrible retribution so long impending over thee, should overtake thee when least expected, and when you are so ill-prepared to meet it."

Filcher laughed scornfully, and did not trouble himself for a minute or two to return any answer; while the peculiar and unearthly tones of the old woman's voice, and the observations she had already made use of, increased the superstitious fears and dismal forebodings Beaufort had suffered to take possession of him.

"Speak, woman," he demanded; "what is the meaning of all this mystery? and for what purpose do you now address yourself to us?"

"To pour in your ears, and those of your inhuman associate in crimes, words of warn-



ing that should make you tremble, certain as they are to be fulfilled," replied the sybil; "have you the courage to listen to them?"

"The courage to listen to a poor old idiot, like yerself, ha! ha! ha!" laughed Sam Filcher, "come, I like that here. But fire away, my old buttercup, an' be quick about it, for I'm in a hurry, an' this is not the sort of weather, or the place to listen to a long yarn about nuffin. I s'pose now yer've got summat astoundin' to tell me, so you may as well let me hear it at once."

"Murderer!" exclaimed the old woman, in a tone of voice, and with an expression of countenance which, in spite of his pretended scorn and indifference, startled even the hardened scoundrel, Sam Filcher, and made Beaufort tremble and look around him, as though he feared that some one might be

listening. "Thief, murderer, dare you listen to the prophetic words I have to utter, and yet affect to treat them with contempt? Tremble! the blood of your unfortunate victims will not call for ever for vengeance in vain. Justice will not for ever sleep. Your dark career of crime is drawing to a close; but a little longer and your death knell will sound, and the gallows will demand its due."

"Damnation!" exclaimed the enraged miscreant, in a hoarse voice, and clenching his fist menacingly—while the conscience-stricken Beaufort, trembling at the coward fears that beset him, and which he could not resist, stared at the mysterious woman aghast, and awaited in terrible suspense to see the result of this unwelcome meeting. "Damnation!" repeated Filcher, in fiercer tones than before—"d'yer think, yer croakin

old hag, that culd Sam Filcher, the Sprig of Myrtle, has lived to all these here years, to be frightened by an old scarecrow like yer? An' I tell yer vot it is, yer'd better be a little more choice in yer langidge, when ye're a speakin' to a gemman like me; and if yer wallies that preshus old neck of yourn, yer'll not make use of any more sich hepitaphs as them here yer've just spoken."

Villain! thief! murderer! I say again," almost shrieked the aged gipsy, and her eyes seemed to flash fire as she spoke, while she shook her bony fist threateningly in the air. "Darest thou to threaten her whom no one yet beheld without feelings of awe and dread? I repeat that thy career of infamy and bloodshed is drawing to a close; the hangman waits you—you shall die the death of a dog, amidst the yells and execrations of an exulting multitude. The gibbet shall receive your ghastly, loathsome corpse; vultures shall prey upon your flesh, and your bones rattle and moulder in the wintry blast."

"Foul hag of hell, I'll hear no more," cried the infuriated ruffian, clenching his fist, and rushing upon the sybil, who, however, never for a moment changed her attitude, or exhibited the least emotion of fear; while, on the contrary, she met the fierce gaze of Sam Filcher, whose countenance was inflamed with rage, with a look of scorn and defiance. "Let this here stop yer damned tongue, and teach yer better manners in futiur!"

As he thus spoke, he aimed a violent at the head of the old woman, but ere it could take effect, Beaufort seized his arm, with a look of mingled terror and reproach, as he said:

"Hold! rash man, what would you do? Would you strike an aged helpless woman, even hardened and reckless as you are? Shame on you—shame on you."

"Release yer hold, yer silly hearted cur," exclaimed Filcher, with increased rage, "or damme if I don't quickly also give yer cause to repent this here boldness. Now croakin' hag, begone—step it, or it may be the last time as yer'll have the hooportunity of a hindulgin' in this here mad whim of yourn."

The sybil again laughed aloud with scorn and defiance; and Filcher, excited to a pitch of the most ungovernable rage, with a fearful oath, was again rushing upon the old woman, when she seized his wrist, and grasped it with a strength and violence that was truly surprising in one so aged and apparently feeble.

"Cowardly miscreant!" she cried, and her small but piercing eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets, as they glared upon him. "Would'st thou strike me, apparently so helpless, and whose age at least should protect her from thy brutal violence? My curse—my withering curse be upon thy

guilty head for this. May vultures gnaw thine heart, and feed upon thy maddened brain. Mayest thou for a time continue to live to endure all the tortures of perdition, thy certain doom hereafter. May all the horrors of despair rack thy blackened soul, and—

"Mocking devil!" interrupted Filcher, placing one hand in his coat pocket, as he spoke; and hastily withdrawing it again—"You, at any rate, shall not live to see yer curse fulfilled. Thus do I prevent that, an' stop yer damned tongue for ever."

Beaufort, horrorstruck, made an attempt to arrest the murderer in his deadly purpose, but before he could do so, an appalling shriek from the aged woman rent the air, and Filcher withdrew a knife which he had plunged into her side, and which was followed by a stream of blood that gushed from the gaping wound, and quickly gathered in a pool upon the snow-covered ground.

The pale moonbeams at that moment streamed upon the distorted features of the unfortunate woman, and revealed to the horrorstruck sight their ghastly expression, and which was quite frightful to look upon. She relaxed not her hold of the murderer's arm, but grasped it more firmly in the convulsive agonies of death, while her eyes glared upon him with an expression that was truly dreadful.

The murderer himself stood appalled at the dreadful crime he had in the excitement of his feelings at the moment committed; he could not attempt to release himself from the death grasp of the unfortunate old woman—he could not speak, but stared vacantly at the ghastly countenance and writhing limbs before him, and awaited with a feeling of terror, which he had seldom if ever experienced before, to hear her dying words.

As for Beaufort it would be difficult to describe the horror of his feelings at the moment, and while he gazed at the bleeding form of the ill-fated old woman, and watched the fearful looks she fixed upon the guilty Filcher. The deed was so sudden and so unexpected, that he could scarcely believe that it had taken place; but imagined that he must be labouring under some frightful delusion of the senses.

And thus for a minute or two the murderer and his victim stood, and not a word, not a sound interrupted the solemn silence, nor did the unfortunate woman in the least relax her hold, notwithstanding the blood flowed copiously from the dreadful wound, and it was evident that death must be fast approaching.

At length the looks of the wretched woman became still more appalling, so that Beaufort could scarcely dare to gaze at them, and Filcher—in spite of all his efforts to

control and conceal the terrible feelings that agitated him—trembled violently. But a moment, and her lips parted, and in a voice that already seemed to issue from the depths of a charnel-house, so hollow and unearthly were its tones, she said, still keeping her eyes fixed with the same ghastly expression upon the face of the assassin—

“Murderer! thou hast added one more crime to the black catalogue which will weigh thee down to perdition; and may my dying curse be upon thy guilty head, and pursue thee for the remainder of thy days. Peace thou shalt never, never know again, and even as thou now seest me, sleeping or waking will I ever more be present to thine imagination.

As the last words escaped her, she gradually relaxed her hold, still keeping her eyes fixed upon the now pale countenance of Filcher, and at last sunk upon the earth in the midst of her own blood, and with a groan of intense agony the soul of the wretched old woman took its flight to eternity.

CHAPTER CXXII.

THE MURDERER AND HIS ASSOCIATE.

For several minutes Filcher and Beaufort stood transfixed to the fatal spot, and looked with horror on the corpse of the murdered woman, whose glassy eyes—which were open—even in death seemed fixed upon the perpetrator of the frightful deed, and he could almost imagine that again the last awful words she had uttered wrung in his ears.

The solemn silence which reigned around, was only broken at intervals by the dull moaning voice of the wind, and there was no one to witness the dreadful scene.

“Brutal villain!” at length exclaimed the agitated and horror-struck Beaufort, unable any longer to withhold the expression of his feelings, “how terrible is the crime you have committed, and for which the curse that with her dying breath she invoked against you, will most assuredly pursue you.”

“Why then did the infernal old hag per-
wake me to it?” returned the hardened scoundrel, quickly recovering himself from the state of fear and excitement at the bloody work of his own hands, under which he had laboured for the last few minutes, and assuming his usual looks and tone of indifference; “howsoever the jobs done, an’ it can’t be undone, so it’s no use snivelling about it. I dare say she’s as vell out of the world as in it; she von’t not be no loss to s’ciety, I reckon, they von’t not erect a public statty to her memory, I’ll vager, any more than they vill to von of us when ve

turns up our toes, and I don’t think as how I shall put myself to the expense of goin’ into mournin’ for her. She vill lay here snug enuff, an’ soon become buried in the snow, poor old creetur’; vot a damned fool she vos to aggrawate me; the old witch could not foretell her own death arter all it seems.”

“Heartless miscreant,” exclaimed the disgusted and horrified Beaufort.

“Hold,” commanded Filcher, sternly, and fixing a threatening look upon Beaufort, “not so fast, if yer please, better langidge when addressin’ of yourself to me. How the devil can a feller help sich accidents sometimes? Asides, it vos all her own seeking, an’ I’m not a goin’ for to break my heart about it.”

“Oh, Filcher,” said the trembling Beaufort, looking at him with increased horror and disgust, “can you, dare you thus lightly speak of this dreadful crime?”

“In course I can,” replied the villain, deliberately wiping and closing the knife with which he had committed the atrocious deed, “I’m not a goin’ for to fret myself to death about it, I can tell yer, no, no, yer may be sure as how the Sprig of Myrtle is not sich a chicken-hearted feller as yerself. It vos lucky, though, that no von but ourselves vos near to vittness the deed, so ve’er all right.”

“The most terrible vengeance of heaven will most assuredly overtake you for this hideous crime,” said Beaufort, averting his looks from the livid face of the corpse with a shudder of horror.

“Hold yer damned tongue, fool,” said Filcher, sternly, while at the same time he could not help trembling, when he remembered the dying words of the murdered woman, “cease yer whinin’ nonsense, or yer may p’raps excite my anger, which ’ud be none the better for yer. I don’t want to hear a sarmint.”

“Let us quit this fearful, this fatal spot,” said Beaufort, in a tremulous voice, and looking timidly around him, as if he feared the approach of some one.

“Vell,” said Sam, as coolly and calmly as if nothing unusual had occurred; “I’m perfectly hagreable to that air, for it’s preshus cold, an’ I feels more hungry than ever. There are the lights still glimmering yonder, so ve’d better make our vay towards them, and see vot luck’s in store for us.”

“Oh, how can we dare to meet the gaze of any one after this frightful deed?” said Beaufort, still shuddering and averting his looks from the ghastly face of the corpse, which looked still more awful in the moonlight which streamed full upon it.

“Ye’re a fool,” returned Filcher, “vot have ve got to fear? Whose to suspect us? That is if yer don’t betray yerself an’ me too through yer cowardly fears; it is not

likely that the body of the old 'oman vill be diskivered for a day or two in this here place, kivered as it will be by the snow, an' then ve shall be fur out of the neighbourhood, I dare say, and whose to know who did it? Now then, jist rouse yerself, vill yer, an' mind vot ye're about. Let us be goin', for summat strikes me as how ve be all right an' cumfurtebel presently."

Beaufort made no reply, for the feelings of terror that continued to agitate him, would not allow him to do so, but he cast one fearful look towards the corpse of the unfortunate old woman, and then followed with trembling steps the miscreant Sam Filcher, who now appeared to have completely recovered himself from the fears that for a time had assailed him, after the perpetration of the dreadful crime, and conducted himself in the same careless manner, as if nothing had happened.

Suddenly, however, he stopped, as a thought seemed to strike him, and looking back towards the fatal spot which they had just quitted, he said—

"I vonder vether the old woman has got any blunt about her. Fortun' tellin' is not a bad b'sness sometimes I've heard, asides, I don't s'pose as how she'd tumble over nuffin as comed in her way. Come along, captain, who knows vot may turn up for us?"

"What would you now do?" interrogated Beaufort, in a tremulous voice, and looking anxiously and suspiciously at his guilty companion.

"Return, to be sure, and jist overhaul the clothes of the poor old gal, to see vwhether she happens to have a sly guinea or so concealed about them," replied Filcher, as he moved towards the spot. "Vhy don't yer come along, and not stand there tremblin', an' looking so frightened?"

"Forbear, Filcher," said Beaufort, with a look of terror, "Are you not satisfied with the deed of blood you have committed, but that you must add robbery to it? Dare you again venture to approach the corpse of your unfortunate victim, with her blood still upon your hands?"

"Bah!" returned Sam, impatiently—"Vot a poor drivellin' cur yer have become. Vot harm is there in taking anything, she may have about her, since she can't make not no use of it now; an' ve might as vell have it as anybody else—specially as ve're so preshus hard up. Come along vith yer, and let's have no more hesitation about the b'sness."

"Oh, I dare not again look upon the terrible work of your accursed hands," said Beaufort, again trembling violently. "Let me remain here."

"Nonsense," returned Filcher, laying hold of his arm, and urging him along, "I'm not

a goin' to hencourage yer in yer cowardly fears, yer may depend upon it, so yer may as vell say no more about it."

Beaufort did say no more, for he knew it would be useless, and with a terrible feeling of dread, he followed the brutal ruffian back to the fatal spot, looking at the same time cautiously and fearfully around to see that no one was near to observe them.

The distorted features of the poor old woman looked still more awful—at least to the imagination of Beaufort—than before, and the agitation of his feelings increased as he gazed upon them. But Filcher exhibited not the least emotion, but, on the contrary, a look of exultation seemed to overspread his forbidding countenance, which Beaufort noticed with the utmost disgust.

"Vell," he remarked, as he looked at the cold remains of the wretched woman, "She's quiet enuff now. It's all over with her fortun tellin'. Now for it; let's see if there's any luck for us."

He knelt down by the side of the lifeless body as he spoke, and proceeded to examine her pocket and her ragged clothes, Beaufort watching him with the most torturing anxiety.

"Hold! for mercysake, hold, Filcher," he suddenly exclaimed, with a look of terror, and grasping the villain's arm.

"What's the matter vith yer now?" demanded Filcher, sternly. "Vhy air yer a staring, and a gaping, and a tremblin' in that manner?"

"Did you not hear?" interrogated Beaufort, still clutching his arm, and looking fearfully and imploringly in his face.

"Hear," repeated Sam, impatiently, "hear vot. Vot foolish hidea hav' yer got into yer head now?"

"Did you not hear a groan?" said Beaufort, in a voice scarcely audible, and his limbs trembling. "It seemed to come from the mouth of the corpse, and I could almost fancy I saw the lips move, and—"

"Cease," interrupted Filcher, with an oath. "Are yer goin' mad? Whoever heard of a corpse groanin', I should like to know?"

"Let us leave this place, I beseech you."

"Not till I have finished my search, you may depend on that"

Beaufort could scarcely suppress a groan, so powerful was the impression which his tears and his disordered imagination had formed.

Filcher deliberately proceeded with his search, muttering curses of disappointment as he did so, for the pocket of the poor old woman contained nothing but a few pence, and he carefully felt about the patches in her cloak, but without any better result.

"No luck," he observed, with a look of disappointment, "it seems as how I've

reckoned without my host this time. The old 'oman vos as poor as she looked. Howsomdever, I'll not give it up for a bad job yet."

A thought seeming to strike him as he said this, the villain thrust this hand into the bosom of the murdered woman's ragged gown, and an exclamation of satisfaction immediately escaped him as he did so.

"All right," at last he said, as he drew forth a small canvass bag, and rattled the contents, "I've diskivered the old 'oman's savin's bank arter all. Vot a careful old creetur she vos, to be sure. Let's see vot's here."

He emptied the contents of the bag into his hat as he spoke, and an exclamation of pleasure again escaped him.

"Gold, by jingo," he cried, "two—four—six—eight—ten—twelve guineas, almost as bright an fresh as when they comed from the mint. Ve're in luck agin; vot d'yer think of it now, captain, eh?"

Beaufort still evinced the same emotions of terror that he had done before, and looked at Sam with a mingled expression of horror and disgust, but said nothing. To such a pitch were his superstitious fears excited that he almost expected to see the murdered woman arise and arrest the miscreant Filcher in his guilty purpose.

"Vot have yer got to look so grim about?" demanded the latter, with a savage look, "vill nuffin never satisfy yer? It vos a lucky thought of mine to search the old gal, and no mistake. Vot would yer do without me, captain? for ye're never up to nuffin, or if yer air, yer can't find the pluck to do it. The old 'oman might as vell have saved a little more though. But beggars mustn't be choosers, and we shall find this bit of money very handy jist now."

"Heartless, hardened wretch," Beaufort could not help ejaculating, as he turned disgusted away.

"Hollo there," cried Sam, "vot is that yer say? I tell yer again yer'd better be a little more careful in the sort of language which yer use to me, or ve might happen to quarrel yer know, and that might not be altogether agreeable to yer. But enuff of this, ve're breeched again, and now ve can sail along with fresh courage; so let us begone, or ve may be too late to get a lodging for the night and that there would be as bad as a death warrant to us."

Sam Filcher having tied up the bag with its glittering contents, and deposited it carefully in his pocket, moved away from the spot, and Beaufort willingly followed him, not daring again to look towards the corpse, but the most dreadful and torturing thoughts at the same time holding possession of his mind, and his terror of the brutal ruffian in

whose power he so completely was, increasing every moment.

CHAPTER CXXIII.

THE DEN OF INFAMY.

They proceeded with increased difficulty, for their long exposure to the severity of the weather had completely exhausted them, and they looked forward to the rest and shelter they expected to find with the greatest anxiety, for they felt convinced that it would be utterly impossible for them to travel much further, and in that case their fate appeared certain.

They still perceived the glimmering lights and the farther they advanced, they were the more convinced that they shone in the windows of some human habitation, the dark outlines of which they could at last discover, and that renewed their hopes, although Beaufort was so fearfully excited by the dreadful events of the night that he could scarcely contain himself, and he almost feared to encounter any one—which they must do in seeking the accommodation of which they stood so much in need—lest their appearance should excite suspicion, or their agitation should betray them.

The dying looks of the poor old woman as she fixed them upon her murderer in her last agonies were still vividly presented to his imagination, and the last awful words she had uttered again seemed to ring in his ears and filled him with horror. He scarcely dared to raise his eyes from the earth lest he should encounter her ghastly form, and so great was the excitement of his feelings that it was impossible for him to conceal them.

But the hardened ruffian Filcher entertained no such thoughts or fears, and in fact he seemed not only perfectly at ease in his mind, but on the best of terms with himself, sometimes even attempting to hum a song to himself, or to get up a brief whistle, to the horror and disgust of his wretched companion, who, what with fatigue and anguish of mind, was almost ready to sink to the earth.

The snow again fell thick and fast, and the wind once more blew in hollow gusts, and so piercingly cold, that it was almost impossible to bear against it.

The house from which the lights proceeded also now appeared at a much greater distance than they had at first imagined, and there was everything to dishearten and annoy them.

"I can't say that this is wery pleasant travelling, or von of the most hagreeable

nights to be out in," remarked Sam, again buffeting his sides to coax a little warmth into him, "it sesms as if ve should never reach that preshus house vvhich stares us so temptingly in the face. How d'yer feel now, captain, eh?"

"Ask me not; I'm wretched."

"Yer allus air," said Sam, "so that here's nuffin new. Vot air yer flurrying yerself about now?"

"Filcher," returned Beaufort, "can you wonder at my agitation after what has this night happened? Does not your own conscience reproach you for the dreadful crime you have committed?"

"Conscience be damned," replied the villain; "I'm not such a rank cur like yerself, to let it trouble me."

"But you must do so," said Beaufort, "notwithstanding your pretended callousness, the looks, the words of that unfortunate woman, whose blood you so wantonly shed, must haunt your imagination, and will continue to do so to the latest hour of your existence."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Filcher, "why should it trouble me? The old idiot should have kept a civil tongue in her mouth, an' then it wouldn't have happened. I'm not the sort of cove, an' yer ought to know that, to be bullied or hinsulted by any von, 'specially a 'oman."

"You seem to take a savage delight in murder," said Beaufort, "how appalling is the list of crimes you have committed, and for which a fearful punishment awaits you. The dying prediction of your wretched victim will be realised."

"Indeed," sneered Filcher, "vell p'raps they may. Ve can't live for ever, an' it don't matter how ve kicks the bucket, so long as ve only dies game, vvhich I'm determined to do. There's von consolashun for yer, an' that is, yer von't be left behind to mourn my loss, for you'll have to company me vvhenever it comes to my turn."

Beaufort groaned.

"Come," said Sam, "let's have no more of that here, if yer please. I'd just remind yer, howsomdever, that ve must be cautious how ve conducts ourselves afore strangers, if ve would avoid suspicion, d'yer hear?"

Beaufort's looks showed that he not only heard but understood him too well, and he said no more, but with difficulty dragged his weary and benumbed limbs through the snow towards the house where they hoped to obtain accommodation for the night, although Beaufort could not but entertain some doubt in consequence of their miserable and suspicious appearance.

Filcher, however, now that he had money felt perfectly confident, and was picturing to himself the comforts of a cheerful fire, a hearty

meal, and a comfortable bed, which he imagined to be in store for them after the miseries to which they had been exposed.

As they approached nearer the building, they perceived that it stood alone, and that the lights they had observed proceeded from some of the lower windows, but whether it was an inn or private house, they had not the means of ascertaining at present.

"No matter," remarked Sam, "commedashun ve must an' vill have anyhow, for ve're pretty vell done up, and they must be very hard-hearted people indeed as 'ud refuse two sich mis'erable travellers, sich a night as this."

"We deserve it not," said Beaufort, "the proper place for two such villains as us, is the dreary cell of a prison."

"Wery vell," said Sam, "that may be yer taste, but it don't happen to be mine. But, hark yer, captain, if yer dare to do anything as may cause suspicion, I'll give yer sich a pill as yer may not be able to swaller."

As the ruffian made use of these threats he fixed upon Beaufort a look of such terrible meaning that he trembled.

"Filcher," he observed, "you take a pleasure in annoying me at every opportunity. What can urge you on to this?"

"Becos I hate a feller as is allus a funkin' over nuffin," replied Sam, "an' konsecently that is vot makes me try an' shame yer out on it. Now then, ve air getting near the house, an' ve must mind vot ve're about."

Beaufort said no more, as he knew full well that all argument or persuasion were entirely lost upon upon him.

They had by this time got to within a short distance of the house, when a loud and uproarious noise of shouting, laughing, and a rattling sound like the jingling of glasses, and the rattling of knuckles upon the tables, saluted their ears, and which brought them for a minute or two to a stand still, and made them hesitate whether or not they should approach the building, Beaufort's fears suggesting that it might be dangerous for them to do so.

"Vell," observed Filcher, "they do make noise enuff, to be sure, an' if I vos only a judge in these here matters, I shouldn't at all vonder but I might fancy as how they'd been a drinkin' a little deep, an' vos vot is called in a glorious state of tostication. No matter, so much the better for us perhaps, cos yer see, when men air a little bit fresh they sometimes gets vvery generous, an' air the more ready to take pity on those who happen to be hard up. Vell try vot they're made on an' no mistake, but remember vot I've said, d'yer hear, keep up yer mettle, an' don't say nuffin, but hack as I does."

Beaufort signified that he would do so, and they then proceeded, and in a few minutes they stood before the door of the building.

It was an old lumbering, strange and uncouth-looking brick edifice, whose style of architecture it would be difficult to describe, and stood alone upon the borders of the heath, surrounded by everything wild and cheerless.

For what purpose it had been originally erected—which must have been at least two centuries back—and that to which it was at present appropriated it would have been hard to imagine, but its aspect was most uninviting otherwise than from the reflection of a blazing fire, which might be seen glowing ruddily in the lower windows, and was no unwelcome sight on that bitter cold night to unfortunate wanderers who, like Sam and Beaufort had so long been exposed to the severity of the season, and were worn out with fatigue, cold, and hunger.

As they approached the house they heard a number of rather unmusical voices engaged in shouting—for it could not be called singing—in chorus a song, the character of which may be imagined from the burthen, as follows—

Mankind are rogues of every degree,
So, as long as we have breath we jolly rogues
will be.

"Vell," remarked Sam, with a look of satisfaction, "they seems to be merry enuff, at any rate; I wery much hadmires the sintymint conveyed in that here stave. It's vot every one as knows vot things is must agree to, eh? Now I wouldn't at all wonder if they arn't chaps exactly arter our own heart; jist the vons ve wanted to meet with. Hurrah! I think ve're in luck at last, so here goes to try it, at any rate."

"Be cautious, Filcher," said Beaufort, "there may be danger, and—

"Caution be damned!" interrupted Sam, impatiently, "I don't require it, but it is for you to use it, and yer'd better mind vot yer about. Here goes."

He approached the door of the old house as he spoke, and raising a massive knocker let it fall again with such a hearty good will that the sound re-echoed again through the gloomy old building.

The noise which had before saluted their ears in a moment ceased, all was still as the grave, and all the lights save that from the fire disappeared immediately.

Sam looked at his companion with an expression of some disappointment, and then after again taking a survey of the house, he said—

"Hollo, vot's the meanin' of this? It's not wery civil; but they didn't expect visitors, I s'pose. Here goes ag'in, I'll vake 'em up if possible, an' no mistake."

"It is no use, Sam," said Beaufort, "it is evident that it is no use applying for relief or shelter here, and we may therefore as well abandon the idea, and—"

"Ye're a fool!" interrupted Sam; "d'yer think it's likely as how ve're goin' to remain here to perish in the frost an' snow when there's a chance of comfortable lodgings? I should think not, so now for it ag'in."

Once more he raised the ponderous knocker and twice let it fall with deafening effect, the door seeming to shake upon its hinges with the shock.

"There," he remarked, "if that here don't rouse 'em, why then they must be dead to all hintints an' purpises, Hollo, it's made a bit of a stir, I think."

There was a noise as if of two or three persons ascending the stairs, then after a brief pause, an upper window over the doorway, was cautiously raised from which the head of a man was thrust, and a gruff voice demanded, in no very polite terms, who was there, and what they wanted, disturbing every one at that hour of the night,

"There don't get out of temper, old chap," answered Sam, "an' I'll explain everything in not no time at all. In the first place, ve're two infortunate travellers, as hungry as hunters, and half starved with cold, and as a nat'ral konsekens ve vants summat to eat an drink, a warm by the fire, and a lodging for the night"

"Well," returned the man, gruffly, "you are not very modest in your requests, certainly, and as this don't happen to be a lodging house for vagrants, you may as well move on to the town, which is only a little more than two miles from here."

"Vell that here is kind advice of yourn," said Sam, "considerin' the fineness of the night, an' that ve're so freezed up with the cold that we haven't got a leg to stand upon. Thank yer for nuffin, old sour krout."

The fellow seemed to like the compliment thus handsomely bestowed upon him by the facetious Sam Filcher amazingly, and laughed heartily, but without offering to move from the window.

"It's all wery vell to laugh, old feller," remarked Sam, "when you've got a snug berth, an' plenty stowed away in the inside, but myself and my friend here being almost a perishin' can't afford to do so. But come, I say, I knows perfectly well from that here amiable voice of yourn—I can't see yer phizog, which I dare say corresponds with it though—that yer von t, yer can't refuse vot I ax; you wouldn't like to see me an' my infortunate pal here die at yer door when yer have the means to preserve two preshus lives to s'ciety. Yer couldn't do it, yer couldn't—could yer now?"

This truly pathetic and eloquent appeal to the feelings of the benevolent individual addressed, was irresistible, and it seemed to have the due and desired effect, for he brought a lamp to the window in order to accelerate

his view, and after having inspected the persons of Sam and Beaufort as well as he could, he said—

"You do look queer enough certainly, and I'm half inclined to admit you."

"There," said Filcher, impatiently, "don't let's have any of yer half vays, but go the whole hog at vonce. Didn't yer hear my pal's teeth a chattering, an' his knees a knockin' together? He'll be a dead man in less than five minutes, I'll warrant, if yer don't take compassion on us."

This appeal was even more forcible and irresistible than the preceding one, and the man appeared unable any longer to withstand it.

"I don't half dislike your style of speaking," he said, "so wait a minute, and I'll see what can be done."

He withdrew from the window with these words, and left Sam Filcher and his companion to wait the result with all the patience they could command.

"All right, captain," remarked Sam, "we shall be safely taken in an' done for at last. Keep yer pecker up, vill yer, an' let's have no more of yer nonsense. D'yer understand me?"

"Sam," replied Beaufort, "I feel that wretched after what has happened, that I care not what becomes of me. But I do not like the behaviour of that man, or the aspect of the place. I apprehend danger; let us away from hence."

"Why, the feller's mad to a dead certainty," returned Filcher, with a look of supreme contempt; "d'yer think as how we're going to try an' scramble on two miles further, when we can lodge where we air? Vot have yer got to fear about? It'll be all right, I warrant. Silence, he's coming."

Beaufort did not say anything, but he felt far from comfortable.

The sound of footsteps were now heard descending the stairs, and immediately afterwards the door was unbolted, and thrown open, and a man of unprepossessing aspect appeared with a lamp in his hand.

Beaufort shrunk timidly back, but Filcher met the man's scrutiny boldly, and they had no sooner, by the light of the lamp, met each other's close observation, than they uttered a mutual exclamation of surprise, from which it was evident that they were not unknown to each other, and, although the looks of the man at the same time were anything but satisfactory to Beaufort, that somewhat re-assured him.

"Vot, Joe, my old pertickler," exclaimed Filcher, staring at the man, "it arn't yerself is it? no, not never. It isn't possible. An' yet I can't forget that here han'some mug of yourn. Vot arn't yer lagged yet? Oh, I'm blessed, here's a go."

"Why, it's never the old Sprig of Myrtle, is it?" said the man, with equal cordiality, "who'd have thought of seeing you! Sorry to see you in such bad feather though. Who have you got with you?"

"Oh, you've seen him afore," replied Sam, "though it's a long time ago, and I shouldn't vonder but you've forgotten him. This is my old friend an' partner in all my fortins an' mistartins, the captain. You've heard of him?"

"Of course I have," returned Joe, "and I'm proud to see him, though he, like yourself, seems rather down upon his luck."

"Yes," said Sam, "we're both of us preshus hard up. So don't go for to keep us here shiverin' in the cold any longer. I s'pose we are all right for the night, arn't we?"

"To be sure you are," said Joe, "so follow me, and I'll introduce you to a few more that you are not unacquainted with, and who I dare say will be glad to see you."

"Vill yer now?" said Sam, "vell that is lucky, and no mistake; come along, captain, we're as right as a trivet now, an' it's a great relief arter the hardships we've had to endure. Mind vot ye're about; be cautious," he added, in a whisper, and with a significant look, which Beaufort well understood.

Joe then led the way through a long passage, at the end of which was a door, from the crevices of which lights were distinguishable, and they could hear the voices of several men in conversation. The door was opened, and they were ushered without any more ceremony into a large, gloomy looking room—independent of a cheerful fire that was blazing in the grate—half filled with tobacco smoke, and in which several ruffianly looking men were seated enjoying themselves after their own fashion, having a plentiful supply of drink before them, which to Sam Filcher particularly was a most agreeable and welcome sight.

Of the reception which the worthy individuals, whose fortunes we have thus far followed, more anon.

CHAPTER CXXIV.

LORD SELBORNE.—THE PORTRAIT.

For a time let us leave the guilty Sam Filcher and Beaufort in the rather questionable asylum which they had found, and return to the unfortunate Lord Selborne whom we left in so critical a situation after the terrible accident he had met with.

For some days he remained in so dangerous a state that his life was almost despaired of, and the faithful William, who was in constant attendance upon him, experienced the utmost anxiety.



The injuries his lordship had received were most severe, and his constitution being so much impaired from long mental as well as bodily suffering, his ultimate recovery might be considered almost a miracle.

But owing to the indefatigable care and attention that was paid him—his own medical adviser being sent for without delay from London—he did at last undergo a favourable change, and much to the gratification of William, he was pronounced out of danger, although it was considered that it would be some time ere it would be safe to remove him to London, which his servant was most anxious to do.

For some days, however, his mind was in a most melancholy and wandering state, and that, of course, greatly retarded his restoration to convalescence. In vain he endeavoured

to find some degree of consolation, and to banish Phoebe from his memory, she was constantly present to his imagination, haunting him day and night like a phantom, and torturing his brain to madness. If sincere penitence could make any atonement for his guilt, surely he had amply rendered it, but still he continued to reproach himself for the wrongs he had done her, and accused himself of being a villain whom all must loathe and despise.

He sought in vain to find one extenuating feature in his conduct towards that beautiful being whom he had so cruelly betrayed; but all was so bad, that the longer he reflected, the more severely he condemned himself, and the more acute and insupportable became the anguish of his feelings.

He thought of her as the happy innocent

girl which she was when he unfortunately first became acquainted with her, and by his base artifices and deceptive tongue, lured her away from the path of duty and her home, and of the dreadful consequences that followed, namely, the awful death of her poor broken-hearted mother—whose murderer he accused himself of being—and the bereavement of her unfortunate father's senses, he pictured to himself the terrible mental and bodily sufferings which his hapless victim must subsequently endure, the fearful blight which had thus fallen upon all her hopes and prospects, and his bitter remorse of conscience became still greater than ever.

"What a heartless miscreant must I have been," he would soliloquise mournfully, "to act a part of such consummate villany towards that fair and gentle being whose confidence I had won—seducing her affections from him on whom they had been previously fixed, and who was so well worthy of her love—and who was ready to make any sacrifice for my sake, to accomplish my base purposes by the most villainous means, and then at the instigation of a wretch—from whom I may trace all the errors, or rather the abominable vices of which I have been guilty—to abandon her to misery and shame. Fool, too, as well as villain, that I have been, to cast from me, recklessly, ruthlessly, her that might and would have been to me the source of every earthly happiness; to leave to all the horrors of despair one who was prepared to love me so fondly, and in whose bright smiles monarchs might have felt proud to bask. But I am now severely though justly punished, and my own accursed guilt has rendered that life wretched and intolerable to me, which might otherwise have been one of uninterrupted bliss. I feel myself a guilty wretch unfit to live, and yet oh, unfit to die."

He would beat his breast and groan aloud as he uttered these words, and it was some time before he was able to tranquillise his feelings.

It was such torturing reflections as these which almost constantly besieged his mind, that, as we have before observed, naturally retarded the progress of his recovery, and rendered the most unremitting care and attention necessary, but at last the efforts of his friends succeeded, and he was so far restored as not only to be able to leave his bed but to take gentle exercise in the neighbourhood which served greatly to recruit his strength, and in a few days more, his physicians pronounced him capable of being removed by easy stages to London, whither he had been anxious for some time past to return.

The preparations for the journey were quickly made, and the unfortunate nobleman,

accompanied by his friends, took his departure without delay, and in due course arrived at his mansion in the metropolis, so changed in personal appearance from long bodily suffering as well as mental anxiety, that it was almost difficult for even his most intimate friends and acquaintances to recognise him, though he had the sincere and heartfelt sympathy of all.

He, however, felt a repugnance for society, which he avoided as much as possible, and kept himself almost entirely secluded, brooding over the painful events of the past, and at times abandoning himself to despair.

There was one apartment in the elegant mansion of Lord Selborne, which was fitted up and furnished in a style of the greatest simplicity as compared with the others, but which was the favourite room of his lordship, and which can be easily explained.

In this apartment there was a painting executed by an eminent artist, but which was usually concealed from vulgar gaze by a dark guaze curtain, but on its being removed exhibited to the view that which could not fail to rivet the attention, and excite the most unbounded admiration.

It was a full length portrait of Phoebe, so striking, so life-like, that the beholder might almost imagine that it breathed, and that the lips were about to part to give utterance to some observation. The likeness was perfect, and those who knew the beauteous original might persuade themselves that she stood again before them, as she had appeared in those days ere sorrow had become known to her, when her heart was buoyant with hope, and all around her beamed with the bright sunlight of happiness and content.

The portrait had been painted soon after the elopement of his lordship and Phoebe to London, and at his express desire; she was represented in her rustic dress, and in all that simplicity of appearance and modest beauty as when she was first introduced to the reader at the commencement of our tale; and admirably indeed had the painter accomplished his task.

The reader after this brief explanation will no longer wonder that the room which contained so great, so invaluable a treasure, should now be the favourite resort of his lordship, yet what bitter feelings of anguish he experienced while there, we need scarcely attempt to describe.

For hours together he would kneel in contemplation of this beloved resemblance of her whom he had so cruelly wronged and who was lost to him for ever, and most melancholy were the lamentations he poured forth, the feelings of regret he gave utterance to, and the bitter reproaches he heaped upon himself; and sometimes he was so far carried away by his feelings that his brain

became distracted and bewildered that he scarcely knew what he said or did.

In fact, he would gaze at that portrait till fancy seemed to imbue it with life, and he could almost persuade himself that the fair girl stood again before him, in all her early youth and beauty, and that his guilty conduct towards her, and the sufferings he had been the means of inflicting on her, was but a wild delusion of the senses, some fearful dream, for it seemed too monstrous for reality.

But from such thoughts as these he was too soon awakened by the dreadful truth, and then the agony of his grief, and the bitterness of his remorse became almost too great for endurance.

For two days after his return to London, he could not find the courage to enter this apartment, but at length he could no longer resist the impulse to do so, although his medical attendants fearful of the consequences from the delicate state of his health, and the disorder of his mind, would fain have dissuaded him from it, but their arguments and persuasions were entirely without effect, and they were reluctantly compelled to abandon them.

It was with a heavy heart, and an irresistible sensation of awe that the unfortunate nobleman entered the room, and those feelings were increased by the sombre aspect which everything appeared to wear, the day being remarkably cheerless, and for some minutes he stood with trembling emotion before the portrait, unable to draw aside the curtain which concealed it, fearful, yet anxious to gaze again upon those beauteous features as they had at first won his ardent admiration, and inflamed his breast with those fatal passions that had been productive of so many misfortunes, and plunged him so deeply into crime.

The thoughts that crowded upon his brain at that moment tortured and bewildered him and almost drove him to madness, and for several minutes it was in vain for him to attempt to conquer his emotions, or to obtain anything like a degree of composure.

At length, after a powerful effort, he so far succeeded as to venture to approach the picture, and having with a trembling hand withdrawn the curtain, the portrait burst upon his sight, in the dim light which entered at the window, with an effect that startled him, and filled him with sensations of awe and even terror that almost overpowered him, and from which for a short time he found it difficult to recover.

To his disordered imagination—worked up as it was to the highest pitch of excitement—the portrait seemed to frown upon him, and the features to undergo so terrible a change in their expression that he almost

feared to look upon, yet could not remove his eyes from them: and so powerful was this impression, that he trembled with fear, and could with difficulty persuade himself that it was not the living form of his hapless victim that stood before him, or that he could not hear those withering words of reproach escape her lips which he knew himself so richly to deserve.

For some minutes he stood in the same fixed attitude, and continued to gaze with the same agitation of feelings, the same sensation of superstitious dread, created by his guilty conscience, and from which he found it almost impossible to arouse himself. All the events of the guilty past in those few minutes rushed with tenfold and overwhelming force upon his memory, and the bitterness of remorse was sufficient to hurry him on to some act of violence in the phrenzy of despair.

At last, partially aroused to recollection, he clasped his hands together, with a burst of convulsive emotion, and sinking on his knees before the portrait, in tones of melancholy that must have moved any one to pity who heard them, he exclaimed—

“Beauteous resemblance of that fair and innocent being on whom I have inflicted wrongs which only the most heartless miscreant could be guilty of, oh, dare I gaze upon it without madness seizing upon my brain, and the poignant anguish of remorse driving me to the lowest depths of despair? Can my lips venture to give utterance to one prayer for forgiveness for guilt so monstrous that it is sufficient to make humanity shudder to reflect upon it? Yet could I pour forth my very soul, relinquish all that wealth and title have bestowed upon me to make atonement, and to prove the sincerity of my repentance, to show how much I loathe and despise myself. There is no punishment, however severe, which I do not deserve, and to which I would not submit without a murmur, could I by so doing recal the dreadful past, and hope for future pardon. But no, it is useless for a wretch like me to pray, supplication or remorse cannot obtain me one moment's respite from those terrible suffering which my crimes have justly incurred and which must pursue me to destruction. Phoebe, ill-fated Phoebe, the betrayer of your innocence, the inhuman destroyer of your hopes and prospects, dare not, must not pray for that forgiveness which outraged heaven can never grant him, and which every sense of right and justice denies him.”

The power of his emotions for some minutes choked his further utterance, and covering his face with his hands he sobbed convulsively, and swayed his body too and fro in the intensity of his agony.

At last he again ventured to raise his eyes

towards the portrait, and the expression of his features was painful in the extreme and showed the maddening anguish of the tempest of feelings and conflicting passions that racked his breast, and which every moment became the more insupportable.

"Yes, unfortunate Phoebe," he again soliloquised in the most dismal tones, after a pause; "even so fair and lovely, as you are thus represented, were you when I first beheld you; fatal moment, and yet I could be monster enough to seek and accomplish the ruin of one of nature's most beautiful works, and consign her to misery and shame too terrible even to think of. Oh, why does not this stubborn heart break at the fearful recollection; why do I continue thus longer to live, since even my very presence among my fellow creatures must appear to be contamination, and I dare only hope for scorn and hatred from all who are acquainted with my guilt, and which is stamped in unmistakeable characters upon my brow. I could weep tears of blood in the sincerity of my penitence, but they are all in vain, compunction comes too late, and the curse, the terrible retribution of offended heaven must and will continue to pursue me in this world and the next. And am I not a murderer," he added, after a pause, and with a look of horror and starting to his feet, trembling in every limb as the dreadful thought forced itself upon his brain; is not the untimely death of the poor old woman upon my blackened conscience? Oh, yes, it was my atrocious villany that broke her heart, and the doom of the murderer too surely awaits me. Can I longer continue to live to endure this terrible agony of remorse? Shall I continue to linger on, a curse to myself, and all with whom I come in contact. Oh, why was my worthless life preserved when so near about to be sacrificed? Why should I longer hesitate, when every moment the dark clouds that gather o'er my destiny become the more black and threatening, and there is no other prospect left for me, but hourly accumulating misery."

Again the wretched nobleman paused to give free vent to his feelings, and for several minutes they were of that agonising and overwhelming nature that it was not without the greatest difficulty he was enabled to struggled against them with any degree of patience or fortitude.

Still he remained with his eyes fixed upon the portrait, and the same strange impression which had at first taken possession of him continued to be stamped upon his mind, and so strongly had it now wrought upon his imagination, that he could hardly persuade himself that he was labouring under a delusion of the senses, and that the eyes of the portrait beamed with the expression, and the bosom heaved with the breath of life, and he

almost expected to see it step from the frame, and standing before him with words of the bitterest reproach heap her mingled curses upon his head. Never or seldom had he before felt such a strange sensation of dread steal over him, which he found himself quite incapable of resisting, and which seemed to gain strength every minute.

Unable any longer to support the feelings that stole over his senses, and seemed to chill the very blood in his veins with horror, he harshly drew the curtain again across the portrait, and with a cry of agony which he could not restrain, and covering his face with his hands, as if to shut out some ghastly and frightful object from his sight, he rushed hastily and wildly from the room, and entering his chamber threw himself on the bed, where his excitement continued so to increase that it created the greatest alarm in the minds of those who were promptly in attendance upon him.

For a time indeed his senses appeared to have left him, and it was evidently not safe to leave him alone for a moment, lest in the phrenzy of his feelings, he should seek to lay violent hands on himself.

The wild ravings and lamentations that escaped his lips were quite pitiable to hear, and those who attended upon him, and were well acquainted with the melancholy circumstances of his history could not but deeply sympathise with him, and to heartily wish, although it was most improbable, that something might yet occur to bring about reconciliation between himself and the unfortunate Phoebe.

The terrible ideas which his disordered imagination had conjured up on this occasion, had taken such an effect upon the mind of Lord Selborne, that he suffered a painful relapse, which at times showed the most dangerous symptoms, acting as they did upon a constitution already so much impaired by long suffering; and he was again confined to his bed, his faculties completely prostrated, from which it was clear to his medical attendants that it would require both time and the utmost attention to revive him

CHAPTER CXXV.

OLD SCENES REVISITED.

Lord Selborne had at length so far recovered, that he was again enabled to leave his couch, but his system had received so severe a shock from the recent events that had occurred to him, that it was melancholy to observe the fearful change that had been wrought in his manners and appearance, and the deep depression of his spirits, sometimes

amounting almost to insanity, under which he laboured, from which nothing whatever seemed capable of arousing him while it admitted of no consolation.

He kept himself secluded from all society, became in fact a complete misanthrope, brooding alone upon the sorrows of his past life, and never ceasing to upbraid himself for that of which he had been guilty, and which had been productive of all those miseries he now endured, and which it seemed evident must ultimately bring him to a premature grave. He was restless everywhere, and it quickly became apparent that London—although he no longer mingled in its noise and bustle—was far from calculated to ameliorate, or to effect a favourable change in his condition.

The physicians again advised that he should seek the benefit of the country air, which the unhappy nobleman seized upon with avidity, having formed the desperate resolution once more to seek out Phoebe, and to obtain her forgiveness or perish in her presence, for without that, life was to him no longer endurable.

This resolution alarmed his friends, for they foresaw too plainly the dangerous consequences that were likely to ensue, and would fain have dissuaded him from it, but it was all to no purpose, and he could not listen to their advice with any degree of patience, so strong was the hold which the idea had taken of his mind, and so fixed was his determination.

Something seemed to whisper to him that this time his efforts would prove successful, and that Phoebe, convinced of the sincerity of his penitence, would yield to his prayers and supplications, and pronounce that word forgiveness, which could he but once hear proceed from her lips, he thought he could be prepared to die, since all his hopes of further happiness were at an end.

Most willingly would he have offered her all the reparation and atonement in his power by making her his wife, but under all the painful and revolting circumstances that had taken place, he felt satisfied that Phoebe would shudder at such a proposal, and would never give her consent to become the bride of that man who had so cruelly deceived her, brought shame and misery upon her, and afterwards abandoned her to all the horrors of her fate, and to the scorn and contempt of the pitiless world.

Besides her heart's warmest affections were now irrevocably fixed upon Henry Ashford, who was every way so worthy of her, and who through weal and woe—notwithstanding the manner in which she had once deceived him, and the terrible disappointment and anguish of mind to which she had exposed him—had so fondly and so firmly proved the

fervour and sincerity of his love; and could he from motives which could not be otherwise than most selfish, seek to destroy those golden visions of future happiness, when the present clouds of sorrow that obscured the horizon of their hopes and wishes should have dispersed, in which they had so long indulged? No, his heart revolted at the thought, and yet he could not but feel a bitter pang when he thought of the beautiful and gentle Phoebe, with whom he might have been so happy becoming the wife of another.

Alas, what a treasure had he ruthlessly cast away, and now how terrible was the punishment he so justly experienced.

These thoughts could not but torture and distress the unfortunate nobleman, and it was in vain that he endeavoured to banish them from his mind.

The dark hints which the villain Beaufort had thrown out to him concerning his connection with Phoebe, and which he was perfectly at a loss completely to understand, frequently recurred to his memory, and bewildered his brain, and filled him with strange doubts, suspicions, and misgivings, for which he was at a loss exactly to account, and he could not help thinking that there was still some extraordinary mystery to explain which time alone could unravel, but about which he felt the greatest anxiety.

Nothing being able to dissuade Lord Selborne from the course he had resolved upon, on which all his hopes, anxieties and expectations were fixed, and every necessary preparation having been made for the journey, he once more took his departure from London, in a private travelling carriage, accompanied by the faithful William, who from his long tried services and fidelity he had now learned to look upon more as a friend and companion than a servant, intending to travel slowly, as the delicate state of his health would not permit him to undergo any great exertion,

As they proceeded on the journey, his lordship's mind alternated between hope and fear, and he endeavoured to prepare himself for the painful task he had undertaken, and which it would require all his energies to accomplish. He pictured to himself all that was likely to take place on himself and Phoebe meeting again, and he looked forward to the time with the greatest anxiety, though not without firmness and resolution; for to remain in the same torturing state of suspense he had so long endured, was worse than the most terrible certainty, aye, even worse than a thousand deaths; for to live in the assurance of Phoebe's continued hatred was insupportable, and he could not bear even to think upon it with any degree of patience.

The dreary winter season had passed away, and refreshing spring had now began to shed its genial influence on all around, clothing the fields and meadows in their brightest green, and imparting to the smiling face of all bounteous nature the most cheerful aspect. The trees put forth their richest foliage, and song-birds carolled forth their sweetest notes from every bough. The temperature of the air was mild and healthy, and rendered still more sweet and pleasant by the gentle showers that fell at intervals, and which were in such wholesome accordance with the season.

The health of Lord Selborne felt the most beneficial effects from the weather, and his spirits as he proceeded on the journey—which was performed by easy stages—greatly revived.

As every hour brought him nearer to those scenes for ever stamped upon his recollection by the events that had taken place, the most conflicting feelings agitated his breast, and he fluctuated between sanguine hope, and the most abject fear.

Since the last time he had seen our heroine what extraordinary changes might have taken place; sorrow which had so long been committing its fearful ravages on the unfortunate girl's constitution, had not unlikely accomplished its fatal task, and she might be no more, and thus all his hopes of convincing her of his penitence, the bitter remorse that stung his soul, and of obtaining her forgiveness, would be for ever annihilated. But there was something so torturing, so insupportable in that thought, that he endeavoured to banish it as soon as it had occurred to him.

"I am prepared for almost anything but that," he soliloquised, "to receive the dreadful intelligence that Phoebe had died of a broken-heart, and probably with her dying breath invoking a curse upon my head, would be madness. Oh, God, I implore you to avert so awful a calamity; suffer the unfortunate victim of my cruelty to live, to triumph over all the manifold sorrows with which she has been so unjustly afflicted, and to be rewarded for the unexampled fortitude with which she has endured them, by every future happiness. Let me, I again beseech You, but live to hear the word pardon pronounced by her lips, and I can die content."

Such were the thoughts of the wretched Lord Selborne, as he proceeded on his journey, and at almost every turn of the vehicle which conveyed him, and which had now arrived within a short distance of the neighbourhood of Phoebe's once happy home, some fresh object arose to his view reminding him of circumstances that brought with the recollection the most painful feelings of sorrow, regret, and bitter self-reproach, and

kept his mind in a continual state of agitation.

It was towards the close of a beautiful day that the chaise containing his lordship came within sight of the cottage which had been the birth-place, and that in which all the early sunny days of happiness were passed, of Phoebe Mayfield, and the varied emotions that agitated his breast on again beholding it, the bright but sorrowful remembrances it awakened, may be easily imagined. Its appearance so like what it had been at the time of his fatal connection with Phoebe, and till after he had been the guilty cause of her abandoning it, and her aged parents, struck him most forcibly, and caused him the greatest anguish of mind.

Alas, what a fearful change had come over the spirit of the dream, how terrible were the events his guilty conduct had brought about, he shrunk from the contemplation, and again he heaped upon himself the bitterest reproaches.

Once more the scene outside that rustic dwelling on the fatal evening of the elopement, rushed still more vividly upon his recollection than ever, and almost overwhelmed him with its effect, and unable longer to gaze upon a scene with which he was so immediately and painfully associated, he gave orders for the vehicle to be driven hastily on, and then pressing his hands upon his forehead, he became for a few minutes completely lost in the bewildering and dismal reflections that racked his brain.

The old village church-yard, and the Hazel Dell, were each passed in their turn, and gave rise to thoughts in the mind of Lord Selborne which it is useless to attempt to describe, and after driving hastily through the village of Dewsbury, the carriage stopped at the door of the inn where he had before been accommodated on several occasions, and where he proposed to remain during his stay in the neighbourhood, of which he had apprized the landlord by letter, at the same time expressing a wish to remain incognito.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

THE AFFECTING INTERVIEW.

Lord Selborne passed a restless night, for his mind was in a feverish state of excitement, occupied as it was with the form of Phoebe, and the delicate and important design he had in view. He continued to waver between hope, and fear, and irresolution, and at times such feelings of dread came over him, that he was half inclined to abandon all thoughts of seeking the interview he had travelled so far to obtain, but which

he feared was only doomed to end in disappointment.

How could he venture to appear before his unfortunate victim again after what had passed between them at their last meeting? The disgust with which she had evidently viewed him, and the bitter, but at the same time he could not but acknowledge the merited reproaches she had heaped upon his head? Could he hope that anything he might now argue would move her to pity and forgiveness? Ah, no, the wounds he had inflicted upon her were too deep ever to heal, and he dared not look forward to anything but her scorn and loathing; she could never believe in the sincerity of his protestations after the villanous part he had played towards her; his appeals to her, however eloquent and persuasive they might be, could only excite her contempt and indignation, for it was but too certain that she must long since have closed her heart against him, and it was little short of madness in him to suppose that he could make the least favourable impression upon her.

"Presumptuous idiot that I must be," he soliloquised, as the first night of his arrival at the inn he tossed restlessly about on his bed, and in vain endeavoured to bring his mind to any degree of tranquillity, "presumptuous idiot that I must be to encourage such wild thoughts and expectations as those that have brought me hither, for a moment. Must she not view me even with increased disgust and hatred, to behold me again enter into her presence, as if to awaken thoughts and reminiscences, that might otherwise by this time begin to slumber, and to add to the misery it has long been her fate to have to endure. Can I forget her withering words and looks at our last meeting, and can I have become so completely insensible to every feeling of shame as to dare to encounter them again? Oh, no, I cannot, I cannot. Phoebe, ill-fated Phoebe, I have no hope of your forgiveness, and I feel myself a wretch accursed of heaven and man."

He paused, for the intense feelings of emotion which those reflections created overpowered him, and for a time choked his utterance. He continued to press his hands upon his aching temples, and for a time to abandon himself entirely to all the anguish of despair.

"But shall I after all the resolutions I have formed, and the trouble I have taken," he at last resumed, as a faint ray of hope again dawned upon his mind, "thus abandon that design upon which my whole soul had rested, and resign myself to that fate of wretchedness and gnawing anguish which I feel to be no longer endurable? Shall I continue to linger on in this perpetual state of doubt and suspense, than which even

death would be far more preferable? By heaven, I cannot, I will not. No, Phoebe let whatever may be the consequences, even though your looks and words should stretch me a corpse at your feet, I will again behold you, humble myself to the most abject state in your presence, to try to convince you of the sincerity of my remorse, and receive the assurance of your forgiveness, or your curses upon my head. Even the worst result cannot be half so bad as the misery I now endure. My determination is now fixed, and nothing can move me from it. Kind heaven, give me strength and fortitude to accomplish my task as becomes a man."

Having thus come to a determination, he became more calm, and tried to look forward to the issue with hope and confidence.

But still there were many difficulties in the way of the accomplishment of his design which he hardly knew how to surmount. The interview with Phoebe must take place when she was alone, and how that could be contrived he was at a loss to imagine, and he racked his brain to little or no purpose to hit upon a plan.

At one time he thought of forwarding to her a letter, couched in the most persuasive language which his feelings would dictate, and imploring her to grant him one last interview, herself appointing a place where they could meet without any fear of interruption.

But that idea he quickly rejected as completely hopeless, for it appeared to him certain that so far from our heroine acceding to his request, she would only receive the letter which contained it with disgust and indignation, and instantly communicate the same to Henry Ashford and his sister, the result of which he could not for a moment doubt.

There was nothing left for him but to endeavour to meet her as it were by accident, and that wish he could only hope to gratify by keeping a strict watch upon the farm and the neighbourhood, taking care to avoid any other person who might recognise him, and thus frustrate his plans altogether.

Having thus decided, his lordship became more calm and resolute, but awaited the time to arrive when the opportunity he sought might present itself, with the greatest anxiety and impatience.

The sun was just declining behind the western hills, on the second day after the arrival of Lord Selborne at the inn, when, having mustered up all the firmness he could, and endeavouring to prepare himself for the worst, should he be fortunate enough to obtain the interview he sought, he left the house, and, with a palpitating heart, sauntered slowly along in the direction of the farm, every now and then looking cautiously back to see that no one was watching him.

The nature of the thoughts, and the mingled hopes and fears that occupied his mind at that time it is unnecessary to attempt to describe; but his determination remained unchanged, and something seemed to whisper to him and encourage him with the idea that the result would prove more favourable than he had at first imagined, and he gradually became calm and even hopeful.

It was a beautiful evening, and the fine rural scenery by which Lord Selborne found himself surrounded, had seldom appeared to greater advantage than it did at that time beneath the last rays of the setting sun as it sunk to rest in the western horizon. Everything at that peaceful hour was calculated to tranquillise the feelings, and his lordship was not without experiencing its genial influence, but still his anxiety of mind, as might be naturally expected under the circumstances, remained unabated, and he wavered between doubt and apprehension.

Every spot of the ground he traversed was vividly impressed upon his recollection, and many were the events that it recalled to his mind, and many a pang did those remembrances cause, many a sigh of sorrowful regret did they elicit from him, and frequently was he compelled to pause to arrange his thoughts, and compose himself.

Again with a throbbing heart, and looking cautiously around to see that no one was watching him—though he scarcely knew why he should excite any curiosity—and at length passing round the foot of a hill—where Phoebe, he was well aware, had often gambolled in her innocent days of happy childhood—he suddenly came in sight of the farm, and was immediately brought to a stand-still by the thoughts that crowded upon him. With eager eyes he gazed upon it, and when he reflected that it now formed the peaceful home of Phoebe under the protection of her lover, and that that lover was in all probability destined to become her husband, the most torturing emotions agitated his breast with which he could not help mingling one of jealousy, but in which he quickly checked and reproved himself.

"Dare I," he muttered to himself, "envy that man the happiness in store for him, of which I villainously sought to deprive him for ever, after his noble constancy and devotion to that fair being of whom he is so worthy, and for whom he has endured so much, remaining true to her through every adversity, and throwing around her the shield of his protection, when she was cruelly abandoned by all the world, and must have perished. Oh, I must still remain a villain, even for an instant to entertain such a thought. Henry Ashford, I keenly feel my own humiliation, and how much you are my superior in every virtue and manly principle."

Again, he anxiously looked towards the farm, as he thus spoke, but did not venture to approach it nearer, lest he should be seen by those whom he feared to meet, namely, Henry Ashford and his sister.

But was Phoebe at that time in the house? As the evening was now far advancing, it was not at all likely that she was, and if so, there was an end to his hopes and expectations on that occasion, for it was certain that he could not have an opportunity of beholding her, and he could not help feeling dispirited and disappointed, and turned slowly and somewhat reluctantly away from the spot.

"There is no chance of my wishes being gratified," he said, "and I must be mad to encourage such a wild and improbable idea. For the present, at any rate, I must abandon it, and return to the inn; but tomorrow I will resume my anxious watching, at a more seasonable time, and with the fond hope that my wishes may not be disappointed. Phoebe, unfortunate Phoebe, your guilty betrayer cannot rest, until he has once more beheld you, and thrown himself in humble supplication and remorse at your feet."

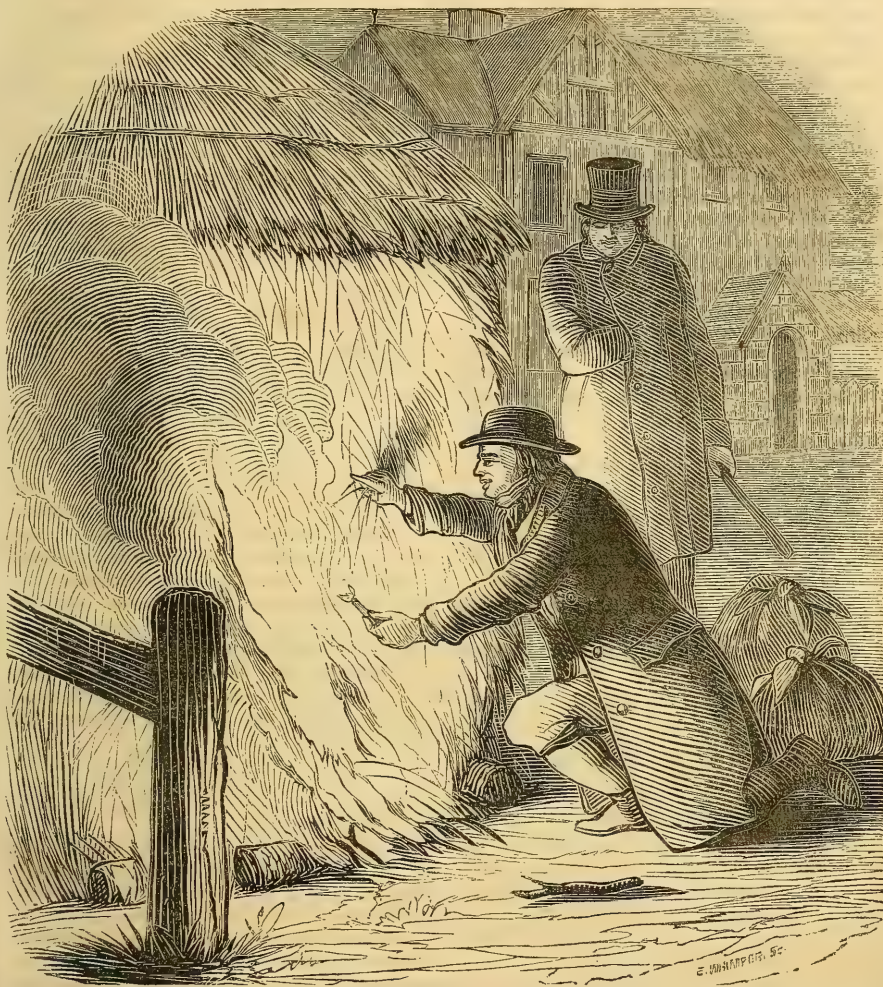
With a heavy sigh, he slowly retraced his steps towards the inn by the way he had come, indulging in thoughts, the nature of which the reader will be fully able to understand.

The beauty of the evening was now increased by the chaste light of the moon, which had arisen, and was shining brightly over the romantic and tranquil scene, imparting a cheerful aspect to the picturesque and extensive landscape which was spread before the admiring eyes of Lord Selbourne, who, for the moment, forgot his sorrows in the contemplation of nature's lovely works.

Suddenly, however, he started, and a tremulous feeling came over him, as he beheld at a short distance, a female form approaching, tripping lightly over the green sward, and every now and then looking back, as though she was fearful that some one was following her.

The heart of Lord Selbourne beat violently, and his agitation increased every moment. He drew aside, and stood in a convenient spot, where he might observe her as she passed, without being noticed himself.

She approached nearer, and, as she did so, and he had a more distinct view of her person, his feelings became the more excited, and he could not help trembling with mingled hope and fear, for there was something in that graceful and sylph-like form (for she was not near enough to enable him to distinguish her features), which appeared strikingly familiar to him, and he could not remove his eyes for an instant from her.



Nearer she approached, and at length arrived at within only a few paces of where his lordship had concealed himself.

There she made a sudden pause, probably to take breath from the speed with which she had walked, no doubt with the anxiety to reach home before the evening had much further advanced.

The position in which she stood was nearly opposite to him, and her features were therefore clearly revealed to him in the moonlight.

We will not attempt to describe the feelings of the agitated nobleman, but an exclamation of astonishment half escaped him as he gazed upon that pale but beautiful face, for it was poor Phoebe,—and the hopes he had formed were thus realized,

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much sooner, and in a manner that he had least expected.

He drew himself back,—he scarcely dared to breathe;—he could not move,—he was rivetted to the spot;—but he could not remove his eyes from that lovely countenance, and his heart palpitated so violently against his side, that it seemed as though it would burst its tenement.

Another instant, and Phoebe moved away, and passed so close to where Lord Selborne was standing, that it seemed scarcely possible she could do so without observing him.

His Lordship's emotions now increased, and it was not without the greatest difficulty that he could control them within the bounds of reason. Yet all his faculties, his energies for the time being, seemed

suspended,—his brain was bewildered, and he was unable to move from the spot on which he was standing, or attempt to follow her, although she was fast receding from his sight, and that interview he was so anxious for, on which all his hopes rested, and which he had travelled so far to obtain would be lost to him, and another such an opportunity might never present itself.

Aroused into action by these thoughts, and wound up to a pitch of determination, he suddenly rushed from the place of his concealment, and followed her in breathless haste, for she had already got to some distance, and it seemed at first doubtful whether he should be able to overtake her.

She heard his footsteps, and looking back, was evidently alarmed, for she redoubled her speed, making her way towards the farm.

“Phoebe! much wronged Phoebe!” exclaimed the unhappy nobleman, worked up to a pitch of distraction by the excitement and agony of his feelings,—“in mercy stop, and grant but a few words to the miserable being, the author of all your misfortunes, and who is driven to madness by the agonies of remorse, and the frenzy of despair! Phoebe! oh for the love of heaven hear me.”

She did hear him; and the tones of his voice seemed to strike upon her ears with overwhelming effect. Hastily she turned her gaze towards him,—uttered a cry of mingled surprise and anguish, and seemed in a moment paralyzed to the spot.

With frantic haste Lord Selborne darted forward, and throwing himself at her feet, looked up in her face with such a mingled expression of sorrow, supplication, and despair, that it was sufficient to excite the deepest sympathy in the breast of the beholder, and for the moment to drown all recollection of the errors of which he had been guilty of, and the bitter wrongs he had inflicted upon the fair being before whom he now knelt, and would willingly have resigned wealth, title, nay even life itself to obtain her forgiveness.

For a few moments the seducer and his victim continued to gaze at each other with looks of distraction, unable to utter a word, and their quivering lips and trembling limbs sufficiently showing the terrible and almost insupportable agony of their feelings.

At length Lord Selborne, having again fixed upon her a look of the most earnest supplication, ventured to take her hand, and endeavour to raise it to his lips, but with an expression of disgust, in which one of abhorrence seemed mingled, Phoebe hastily withdrew it, and retired back a few

paces, although she was evidently unable to leave the spot altogether.

“Phoebe,” at length exclaimed his lordship, in a voice of the greatest emotion, and still remaining in the same humble and suppliant posture, “unfortunate Phoebe, with a bursting heart, and feelings wrought to despair, once more I venture into your presence to pour forth the anguish of my remorse,—to assure you, by all my hopes here and hereafter, of the sincerity of my repentance, and implore your forgiveness,—I——”

“Hold, my lord,” interrupted Phoebe, with a look of scorn, while indignation flashed from her eyes; “your words make no impression on the mind of Phoebe Mayfield, but to excite her disgust and abhorrence. They are bitter mockery to mine ears, as the sight of one whose villany so cruelly destroyed all my hopes, and brought me to misery, disgrace, and shame. Dare you venture to gaze upon the poor confiding girl whose innocence you so ruthlessly and so recklessly betrayed, and then abandoned her to all the horrors of her wretched fate. Dare you appeal to her for pity and forgiveness, whose heart you have nearly broken? Think of my aged mother, whom your base conduct brought to a premature grave,—remember my poor afflicted, grey-headed father, whose reason you have for ever unseated, and oh! may your punishment be all that your crimes so justly merit. But why do I deign to speak to you? Begone, and never more disgust me with your hated presence!”

Lord Selborne groaned aloud in the insupportable agony of his soul, and clasping his hands together vehemently, still continued to gaze at her with looks of supplication and despair. Every word that she had uttered went like a dagger to his heart, for he felt most keenly how richly he merited the bitterest reproaches she could heap upon him; and in the torture and distraction of his feelings he knew not what to say, or how to act.

Phoebe fixed upon him one more look of withering contempt and detestation, and without condescending to utter another word, she was about to hurry from the spot, when the unhappy nobleman worked up to a complete state of frenzy, hastily rising from his knees, and rushing towards her, and throwing one arm round her waist, he forcibly detained her.

“Phoebe!” he ejaculated, in a voice that ought to have been sufficient to convince her of the truth of his words, the sincerity of his repentance, “despair emboldens me, and I cannot suffer you to leave me thus, or till you have listened to all that

the insupportable anguish of my feelings prompts me to say. Oh, can you doubt the sincerity of my words; and not spare me some portion of your pity in the midst of your reproaches, which with the most poignant feelings of sorrow and regret I own are too justly merited? Look on this careworn countenance, this emaciated form, and behold the ravages of remorse and anxiety of mind; mark the fearful punishment to which I have been subjected, and at which I murmur not, (for I know that I deserve it all), could I but move to pity, and receive your forgiveness. Nay, turn not away from me with that look of scorn, for desperation urges me on, and you must and shall listen to me. Oh, how shall I depicture to you the horrible sufferings I have endured since that fatal night when you quitted my home, and——”

“Aye,” interrupted our heroine, with an expression of increased scorn, disgust, and hatred; “you do well to remind me of that dreadful night, when your villany was unmasked, and I was driven forth from your princely mansion, where I had previously imagined myself to reign as supreme mistress, to wander in the bitter frost and snow, without one friend or protector;—without a place of shelter from the inclemency of the weather, with no other companion than the horror of my own thoughts. Think of the fearful sufferings I that night experienced, and those which I have since had to endure, and if you have one spark of proper feeling left, learn to despise and hate yourself for the black-hearted villany of which you have been guilty, and which was the cause of inflicting every misery upon me whose only fault was in placing too much confidence in the false vows you uttered, and in sacrificing everything that should have been most precious to her in existence, for your sake. Release me, my lord, your very touch is now contamination, your presence hateful and revolting to me. Release me, I say, I will no longer be detained.”

She endeavoured to disengage herself from his arms as she thus spoke, but lord Selborne, still more powerfully excited than before, prevented her, retaining his hold, and continuing to appeal to her pity and mercy, by looks of the deepest anguish and supplication,

“Unfortunate, deeply injured Phoebe,” he ejaculated; “this is the last time that I will venture to intrude upon you, and again I implore you to listen to me, and not to drive me entirely to despair. With feelings of the most indescribable shame and bitter self reproach do I acknowledge my guilt, the wrongs I have

inflicted on you. But never was penitence more sincere, remorse more keen and torturing than that which now I feel, and for so long have been enduring. All the tortures of perdition have pursued me, driving me to madness and despair. Surely no poor guilty wretch could have suffered more than I have done, and life has become an insupportable burthen to me. The most horrible thoughts have constantly racked my brain by day, and fearful visions have haunted my imagination by night. Your form, Phoebe, has never been absent from my sight even for a moment; your looks of anguish and of withering reproach have ever been fixed upon me, and the mournful tones of your voice have constantly reverberated in my ears. A curse, a damning curse has pursued me, from which there seems to be no means of escaping. But, oh, what sacrifice is there that I would not freely, gladly make, in atonement for the crimes I have committed, and to gain even a brief respite from sufferings which have become almost to dreadful to bear? Hear me Phoebe, in mercy hear me; if wrath can make reparation for the injuries I have done you, the unmerited sufferings I have inflicted upon you, it is your's. I am ready to lay my fortune at your feet, to resign everything to you, and hiding myself from human sight, flying from all society, pass the few remaining years that I may be allotted to live in solitude and repentance. Let me then but hear that blessed forgiveness pronounced by your lips, and I will endeavour to be content if not happy. You will not, you cannot refuse me, Phoebe; your gentle nature will not permit you to do so, and here on my knees I again implore you.”

“No more, my lord,” returned Phoebe, the same expression of scorn and hatred marking her features;—“you sue in vain; I am no longer to be blinded and deceived by your vows and protestations. Forgiveness!—dare you ask it of her whom you seduced from every earthly happiness, and, having accomplished the object of your base designs, plunged remorselessly into guilt and misery? Shameless effrontery!—even the very sight of me should wither your guilty soul, and drive you to madness. Oh, my lord, shall I recal to your memory the world of uninterrupted happiness and content, in which the humble, but innocent peasant girl moved when she first unfortunately became acquainted with you?—Shall I remind you of the scenes of joy, of earthly bliss in which she ever mingled, a stranger to every care and sorrow?—Oh, how bright

was the sunshine which then illumined her path; how radiant the smiles which everything in nature seemed to beam upon her. She had doting aged parents then, who placed every confidence in her innocence and virtue, and would have laid down their very lives sooner than have been the means of causing her one pang of sorrow. Where are those aged and affectionate parents now? One calmly sleeps beneath the yew-tree in the old churchyard, to which her wretched daughter's infamy consigned her—the other is a wretched lunatic, who never utters that daughter's name without coupling it with a curse!—And 'tis you, you who now dare to seek my forgiveness, who have been the base, the cruel cause of all this!—Oh, God! oh, God!—recollection harrows up my very soul, and hurries me on to madness!”

A ghastly paleness overspread her features as she thus spoke, her limbs trembled convulsively, her brain turned giddy, she fainted, overcome by the excitement of her feelings, and would have fallen to the earth had not the distracted nobleman caught her in his arms, where he supported her, his mind so bewildered and agitated that he was in a state of stupefaction, and scarcely knew what he did.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

THE RESULT OF THE INTERVIEW.

BUT when Lord Selborne was once more awakened to consciousness, what feelings of anguish tortured his breast; in what language can we attempt to portray them? He held the beauteous victim of his guilt (whom he had never expected to behold again) once more in his arms; he pressed her lovely form to his bosom, he felt her heart throb against his own; yet so extraordinary were the circumstances by which all this was brought about, that he could scarcely persuade himself that he was not labouring under the delusion of some singular dream, and continued to gaze upon her with stupified amazement.

Then he endeavoured to recal her to sensibility, though he almost dreaded her restoration to it, for he trembled in anticipation of the additional reproaches which she would too probably heap upon him. But the poor girl still remained quite unconscious, and the agitation and embarrassment of Lord Selborne increased.

Again he pressed her to his bosom, and a melancholy sensation of satisfaction mingled with the other feelings that agitated him, and which he was unable to subdue.

He even ventured to imprint a kiss upon her lips, but he shuddered as he did so, for surely a kiss from such a poor miserable, guilty wretch as him must be pollution; and he could have cursed himself for the boldness and presumption of which he had been guilty.

“Unfortunate Phoebe!” he exclaimed, with a burst of emotion which he could not control,—“and do I indeed once more hold your beloved form in my arms, and press it to my bosom, as I did, when confiding in the honour and sincerity of my intentions, you devoted all your heart's warmest affections to me. Do I once more feel the pulsations of that fond heart, which I have broken, and gaze upon those still beauteous features now so pale and wan by the dread ravages of care and sorrow; and all, all wrought by my accursed guilt, my heartless conduct. Oh! what a consummate villain have I been to make this awful wreck of what was once all so lovely. Repentance and remorse are useless—I can never hope to be forgiven either by Heaven or man!”

Again he groaned aloud in the intensity of his agony;—but what to do, he knew not, he was completely bewildered, and every moment his embarrassment increased, as Phoebe still remained in a state of insensibility, and there was no place near (except the farm, where of course he dared not venture) whither he could convey her, so that her recovery might be immediately seen to.

While he thus stood, in vain trying to decide in what manner to act, casting his eyes in the direction of the farm, he suddenly beheld the shadow of an approaching form, which as well as he could distinguish in the dim light, appeared to be that of a man, and he felt a sensation of dread steal over him, for the situation he was placed in was a most delicate one, especially if the person who was approaching should know him.

But to leave poor Phoebe in her present state was impossible, and therefore there was no other alternative for him but to remain and risk the consequences.

The man now approached nearer, and had evidently observed them, for he shouted aloud and increased his speed to come up to the spot.

The agitation and alarm of the unhappy nobleman became greater, for the tones of the man's voice were perfectly familiar to him, and the direction from which he was coming, strengthened his fearful forebodings;—but let what would happen, it was too late to attempt to avoid the meeting, and he endeavoured to meet it with all the calmness and resolution that he could.

He was not kept long in suspense; the

man quickly arrived at the spot, his form and features being now clearly revealed in the moonlight, and the confusion and agitation of Lord Selborne may be imagined, when he discovered what his worst fears had predicted, namely, that it was Henry Ashford.

For a minute or two, astonishment and an almost indescribable feeling, on beholding his beloved Phoebe supported in the arms of her betrayer, seemed to rivet the young man to the spot; he clenched his fist, his cheeks glowed with the powerful excitement of his feelings, and his eyes flashed with jealousy and resentment; while Lord Selborne stood inanimate, and stared vacantly upon him in confusion and dismay.

"Villain! shameless, hardened villain!" at length Henry exclaimed, partly recovering himself from his amazement; "dare you again pollute the unfortunate victim of your cruelty, by your presence, and seek once more to lure her from the paths of virtue?"

"Hear me, Henry Ashford," in accents of agony implored Lord Selborne; "do not condemn me unheard."

"I scorn to listen to the daring falsehoods your tongue would give utterance to," returned Henry Ashford, passionately, as he snatched the still insensible Phoebe from his arms; "down, libertine, ruffian, down; and rest assured that if you again venture to cross my path, or that of the unfortunate being whose happiness you have destroyed, not even your rank or wealth shall shield you from the consequences; you shall pay for your temerity with your life."

With these words he struck the distracted nobleman a violent blow which felled him to the earth; and fixing upon him a threatening look, he was about to hasten from the spot with his senseless burthen, when she suddenly revived, heaved a deep sigh, and opening her eyes, and discovering herself in the arms of her lover, she uttered an exclamation of mingled surprise and satisfaction and clung to him with the greatest fervour and affection.

"Oh, Phoebe," cried Henry, in melancholy tones of regret and reproach, which he could not restrain, so strong were the feelings of doubt and suspicion that came over him. "I have seen that to-night which racks my brain to madness; you were pressed to the bosom of your hated betrayer. Could this meeting have been accidental, or have you again lent a willing ear to the villain's infamous vows and protestations?"

"Ah!" cried our heroine, fixing upon him a look of surprise and agony; "what dark

words and suspicions were those you just now uttered?—Do you, oh do you, Henry, doubt my truth and honour?—Oh, cruel,—cruel, most cruel!"

Convulsive sobs choked her further utterance, and she again became insensible.

"Rash idiot!—madman!" exclaimed the distracted Henry, "what in the excitement of my feelings have I said? Oh, how little, I am convinced, do you merit the suspicions I have dared to cast upon you. "Misereant," he added, looking towards the spot where lord Selborne still lay prostrate, "it is your villany that has caused all this, and may every curse pursue you for it. Oh, why have you been permitted to triumph in your guilty career so long?"

He pressed a kiss of agony and affection upon the pale cheek of Phoebe, and then raising her in his arms, without deigning to cast another look towards the wretched nobleman, conveyed her with all possible speed towards the farm.

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

LORD SELBORNE'S DESPAIR.—UNWELCOME MEETING.

So violent was the blow which Henry Ashford, in the excitement of his rage, had dealt him, that for some time Lord Selborne lay completely stunned and almost senseless; and when he did again partially recover from its effects, he stared vacantly around him for a second or two, unable to recal clearly to his memory what had happened or where he was, and by that time, Henry, with Phoebe had quitted the spot.

But when all the fearful circumstances did flash upon his recollection most vividly he was violently agitated with mingled feelings of anguish and wounded pride. The result of his interview with Phoebe annihilated all the hopes of forgiveness which he had ventured to encourage, and filled him with despair; but to be insulted and struck by Henry Ashford, was a degradation which he could not easily brook, and for some minutes his feelings of resentment superseded every other in his breast.

"But does not my former base and unmanly conduct merit such treatment?" he at length said, as he gathered himself to his feet, but for the present was unable to move from the spot; "it does,—and what right have I then to murmur or complain?—Oh, the agony of this meeting;—better,

far better would it have been for me, had it never taken place; for it has only proved to me how futile, how presumptuous were my hopes, and added to that bitter agony and remorse which must now pursue me to the grave, and render me one of the most wretched and despicable of human beings. My doom is sealed, and it would be worse than madness in me again to attempt to avert it. Oh, despair!—despair!—how black and terrible is the prospect before me, I shudder to contemplate it.”

He struck his forehead with his clenched fist, as he thus spoke, and for a few minutes his mind wandered, and he stood the very picture of misery, and quite unconscious to everything.

“But can I, ought I to feel surprised and disappointed at the result of this painful interview,” he again soliloquized; “could I expect any other? No, and it was worse than madness on my part to seek it, while it has added to the anguish of that unfortunate being, who has already suffered so severely through my acts of villany, and who can never view me with any other feelings than of disgust and abhorrence. Let me hide myself from mortal sight, for so enormous is my guilt that I should shudder to meet the gaze of my fellow creatures.”

“’Tis him, sure enuff, the wery hidetical gemman, as ve’ve been so anxious to see, an’ not no mistake nayther. Vell, now, this here is lucky;—who’d have thought it?”

These words were spoken in a coarse, but familiar voice, close to his lordship’s elbow, and hastily looking round, his surprise and alarm may be imagined when he beheld the villains Sam Filcher and Beaufort, whom he had not encountered before for so long a time, again standing near him, and the former especially with menacing and sinister looks, mingled with his characteristic coolness and effrontery.

He stared at them both aghast, and was so surprised and confused at a meeting so unexpected and unwelcome, especially after what had already occurred to him, that he was unable to utter a word; and the amiable Sam Filcher putting on as agreeable a smile as it was possible for features so repulsive as his to do,—politely bowed, and evinced every disposition to make the visit as pleasant as possible, at least, after his very peculiar fashion.

Beaufort, however, kept somewhat in the background, and did not seem to enter altogether into the feelings of his ruffianly companion.

They had both again considerably improved in personal appearance (so far as regarded clothes at least,) since the memorable night of the frightful murder of the poor old gipsy sybil on the heath, from which it was evident that they had been successful in their career of guilt, and added fresh crimes to the dark catalogue which already weighed upon their conscience.

“Good evenin’ to yer, my lord,” said Sam, in his usual polite and affable terms, and again bowing; “yer never speaks fust; howsumdever, I’m not agoin’ for to feel hof-fended, I’m wery glad to see yer, and hopes as how yer mortal remains is in fust rate condition, as leaves me at prisint, as the country joskins writes in their letters.”

“Your lordship, no doubt, is surprised to see us again,” remarked Beaufort, “but I assure you that it is quite accidental.”

“Oh, yes, to be sure, kevite haxidental, an’ not no mistake,” said Sam Filcher; “but I trust it will not be none the less agreeabel for that here. It’s so wery pleasant to the feelin’s to meet old friends ag’in, arter a long separashun, ’specially when ve’ve been afear’d as how they’d turned up their toes, an’ gone to snooze in the peaceful and silent grave.”

Sam delivered this touching bit of sentiment with much feeling, heaving a melancholy sigh at the conclusion; nevertheless it made no impression on his lordship; he did not seem to appreciate the beauties of it; no doubt much to the disgust of Sam himself.

“Villains! murderers!” his lordship exclaimed, the excitement of his feelings overcoming his prudence, seeing that he was alone, unarmed, and entirely at the mercy of two such desperate ruffians; “dare you venture to again appear before me, with the blood of my faithful but unfortunate servant upon your consciences?”

“Hold hard there, my lord, if yer please,” said Sam; “ve purfeshnul gemmen hav no pertikler vish to take credit for vot ve never did. As to suspicet, or accuse us ov that here little bus’ness to vich yer has jist ’luded, oh, it’s kevite unpossilibel.”

“There can be no doubt of your being guilty of that frightful crime,” said Lord Selborne, with a look of the most unmitigated horror; “and although you have hitherto escaped, rest assured that justice will at last overtake you.”

“Vell, that here’s kind ov yer, howsumdever,” returned the hardened villain Filcher;—“but thank yer for nuffin; I should jist like for to know vot reason yer

have to believe that myself and the captain, yer old pal here, had anythin' to do with that job?"

"One of your guilty associates in crime," replied his lordship, "lately executed at York, confessed it, and the part he took in the dreadful deed. There can be no doubt of your guilt, and depend upon it, the terrible retribution which it deserves will at length overtake you."

The conscience-stricken Beaufort trembled, and he would fain have hurried Filcher away, and persuade him to abandon the nefarious design he had no doubt in contemplation. But Sam took no notice of him, and addressing himself to the unhappy nobleman, he said:—

"Vot my old pertikler, Jarvey Bob, turn snitch in his last moments? It's keville unpossibel, an' I von't believe it. Howsumdever ve'll drop that here subject, my lord, if yer please,—it's not a wery pleasant von not by no means votsumdever, an' I doesn't like it. S'pose ve jist enters on the bus'ness with yer, since ve has so wery happily met ag'in."

"Villains!" said lord Selborne, now feeling seriously alarmed at the threatening looks of the ruffian Sam Filcher and the observations he had made use of; "what is it you seek of me? Why do you cross my path? Begone, and suffer me to proceed on my way without further obstruction."

"Stop, stop," said Sam, "don't be in sich a hurry; it don't look wery vell on yer arter meetin' with two old friends, who yer've not seen for sich a preshus long time afore. Asides, bus'ness is bus'ness, an' ve ar'n't half done with yer yet. In the first place myself an' the captain would like to drink yer health, an' as ve don't happen to be wery gay in the hexchicker jist now, ve don't mind borrowin' a trifle for that here purpis. In course yer can't not have no hobjeckshun to that."

"Daring ruffian!" said the nobleman; "do you then mean robbery?"

"No, no," returned the hardened scoundrel, with a sinister grin; "borrowin' if yer please, borrowin', only with jist this here purwiser, there's no compulsion only yer must; so yer may as vell say no more about it, but tip up at vonce."

"I will not be intimidated into a compliance with your guilty demands," said Lord Selborne, determinedly, although the odds were so much against him; "suffer me to pass, or my cries shall bring assistance."

"Hold hard, not keville so fast, this here vould perwert yer from doin' that," said

Filcher, producing a knife, and holding it before the eyes of Lord Selborne, with a threatening look.

"Sam," said the terrified Beaufort, grasping his guilty companion's arm, and looking in his face with an expression of of horror; "forbear!"

"Silence, cur!" returned Filcher, savagely; "now, my Lord, are yer goin' to comply without any more bother?"

"I will not," replied the unfortunate nobleman; so agitated and bewildered by other torturing thoughts, that he scarcely knew what he said.

"Then ye're a fool for yer pains," said the miscreant, "an' here's to compel yer!"

Before Beaufort could prevent him, Filcher struck Lord Selborne a desperate blow on the head which immediately stretched him senseless on the earth, and for a moment or two he stood and gazed at his unfortunate victim with looks of savage satisfaction.

"You have killed him," said Beaufort, trembling.

"Not I," returned Sam, carelessly, "though I s'pose it vouldn't have matter'd much if I had. He should have been a little more civil, an' not so hobstinit, then the affair might have passed off pleasant enuff; as it is, I've only kevieted him for a while, so there's not much harm done. Now then to see vot he's made of."

Beaufort ventured not to make use of any further observation, for he knew well that it would only serve to exasperate the villain, and he stood inactively by, looking anxiously and cautiously to see that no one approached to discover them, while Sam Filcher went deliberately to work about his business, and kneeling down by the side of the insensible nobleman, commenced rifling his pockets of everything of value that they contained.

"Pretty fair," he remarked, when he had accomplished this guilty task; "not keville so much as I hexpected. Howsumdever, ve must put up with it I s'pose. I say Beaufort," he added, after a pause, during which he had been looking at his lordship with a dark and threatening expression of countenance, "he knows too much an've might find him rather troublesome; don't yer think that it would be better now ve've sich an hexilent opportunity, to silence him altogether?"

"Horrid thought!" gasped forth the terrified Beaufort, grasping his arm, and trembling violently; "if you would not drive me to madness forbear! Will your

monstrous thirst for blood never cease? Ah! what fearful sound was that?"

"Vot's the matter with yer?" demanded Filcher, with an oath; "vot foolish notion have yer got into yer head now?"

"Did you not hear a dismal groan that was wafted on the night breze?" said Beaufort, his teeth chattering and his knees knocking together, with the most abject and childish terror.

"Damn yer!" cried the ruffian, with a threatening look, "air yer mad? I heard nuffin but the vind."

"No, no," returned Beaufort, trembling more violently than before; "'tis there again, and ah! horror! look! look!—her ghastly form is there!—Do you not see it, standing in the pale moonlight? The Gipsy Sybil has fulfilled her dying threat. See, see, she is there!"

In spite of all his efforts to the contrary, the miscreant Filcher could not resist the feelings of fear that crept over him, as he listened to the words of Beaufort, and observed the terrible excitement under which he laboured, and he looked eagerly but timidly in the direction to which he pointed.

And there, or else the villain's senses were labouring under some wild and fearful delusion at the moment, acted upon by the influence and effects of a guilty conscience, or he saw standing at a short distance in the moonlight, as Beaufort had described, the ghastly shade of the murdered old woman, just as she appeared in her dying moments on the heath; with her hollow eyes glaring upon him, and her long bony hand pointing menacingly towards him.

The courage, or rather the fool hardness he had previously displayed, now entirely forsook him; he looked again more earnestly than before, to satisfy himself he had not suffered his disordered imagination to deceive him, but there stood the ghastly form as palpable as the moon that rode in the Heavens, and, uttering a strange wild cry, and grasping the arm of Beaufort, dragging him after him, he hurried away from the spot, his senses so bewildered and appalled that he scarcely knew what he was about, and plunged into the adjacent wood, never venturing to look back, for fear of again beholding the ghastly phantom which had so appalled him.

And the terror which Beaufort evinced, and as might have been expected, was even greater than that of Filcher, and it was

with the greatest difficulty only that he could drag his trembling limbs after him, and he had not the power to utter a word.

CHAPTER CXXIX.

MOMENTS OF ANGUISH.

It was not until they had penetrated into the very depths of the gloomy forest that the terrified Sam Filcher and Beaufort ventured to stop, and they were then fairly out of breath, and unable to proceed further until they had rested themselves.

Beaufort still exhibited the greatest terror, and strained his eyes as far as the gloom would permit, through the dark mazes of the wood, as if he again expected and feared to behold the awful object which had horrified him so much.

And Sam Filcher at first evinced similar excitement and terror, and his eyes wandered wildly and vacantly, and his face was ghastly pale.

But he quickly recovered himself in the most extraordinary manner, and presently burst forth into a hearty roar of laughter, which completely startled the astonished Beaufort, and lasted for two or three minutes, and till the eccentric Mr. Filcher was fairly red in the face, and every vein on his forehead was puffed and swelled with the remarkable exertion.

"Filcher," said his still trembling companion, looking at him with a mingled expression of surprise, disgust, and horror; "what means this wild ebullition? Surely you must be mad. Why this unseemly mirth, which I am convinced must be so foreign to your real feelings? What is it that thus excites your rude laughter?"

"To think what a preshus pair ov fools ve've made ov ourselves," replied Sam, again laughing heartily; "only to think as how the ould sprig ov myrtle should live to be frighten'd, or gammon'd rayther, into the hidea as how he'd seen a ghost. Ha! ha! ha! vell, I never; come, that here is good,—ha! ha! ha!"

And once more the villain made the very air resound again with his boisterous mirth, while Beaufort stood and gazed at him in stupified amazement, quite shocked at his levity.

"It was all owin' to you," he said, "with yer stupid fancies, or I never should hav' made sich an ould hass ov myself. Oh, dear! oh dear! oh dear! ha! ha! ha! if this here



doesn't bang cock fighting, I doesn't know vot does."

"Sam," observed Beaufort, with a serious look, "however much you may now affect to treat this awful event with incredulity, and disgusting levity, I am satisfied that your conscience is at length awakened to a sense of the enormity of your guilt, and that the last awful words of your unfortunate murdered victim must have made an impression on your mind which—"

"Hold, drivelling cur, vill yer?" interrupted Sam Filcher sternly, endeavouring to continue to look upon the matter with his usual indifference, and to assume a bold and reckless daring; but unable to conquer or conceal the real terror which the extraordinary and awful circumstance had excited in his mind; "d'yer want to haggerawate me?"

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Cos, if yer does, yer might have cause to be sorry for it. Damn yer, an' conscience too; yer pitch a verry fine yarn, don't yer? Yer'd have made a much better parson than a prig."

"This bravado is all assumed, Filcher," returned Beaufort, determined not to submit entirely to his brutal humour, "in spite of your efforts to conceal your fears I can see them plainly in the expression of your features, the wild wandering of your eyes, and the quivering of your lips."

"Ye're a fool," returned Sam, passionately, clenching his fist, and seeming half inclined to strike his companion in the excitement of his feelings, who ever allowed yer to be a *common sewer* of phizimibogomy, I should jist like to know. Am I alwus to be pestered vith yer nonsense and cowardly fears? D'yer

vant to make me as great a cur as yerself? I must have been a fool to be gammoned by yer into the fancy that I'd seen the old woman's hotbergobolin."

"It was no delusion, Filcher," said Beaufort, solemnly, and almost fearing to look around him, lest his eyes should again encounter the ghastly spectre of the murdered woman; you cannot be so obstinate as to deny it."

"Bah."

"Oh, Filcher, as sure as you stand there a living man, it was the ghastly shade of that ill-fated woman whom you so brutally murdered, that appalled our sight, and thus fulfilled the fearful threat which she uttered in her dying moments. I shudder with horror as I now reflect on it. Filcher mark me, for I confidently feel the truth of what I say, those threats will be fulfilled to the very letter, the frightful form of your unfortunate victim, her pale and distorted features, as they appeared in all the agonies of a violent death, will ever more be present to your appalled imagination."

"Cease, I tell yer, yer confounded coward," exclaimed the ruffian Filcher, with increased rage, but at the same time greatly agitated and alarmed at Beaufort's observations, "I will not listen to yer foolish notions, and timid fancies. D'yer think that Sam Filcher, the Sprig of Myrtle, allus so celebrated for his pluck, is turned silly in his old days, that he's a going to suffer himself to be gammoned in that here way? Ha, ha, ha! it's a good joke too, I think I must be half cranky to ever have shown the white feather in such a way. But it's all over now, an' it will serve me to laugh at for many a long day. Ha, ha, ha! only to think that Sam Filcher should have suffered himself to be so deceived. Ha, ha, ha!"

And again the desperate and hardened villain made the forest resound with his boisterous laughter, while the disgusted Beaufort stood by, and gazed at him with an expression of the utmost horror, at the same time the most insupportable and unconquerable terror shook his own guilty soul.

"Now then," said Filcher, after he had indulged himself for a few minutes in this strange wild mirth, "don't be standing there an' a looking at me as though yer vos mad, or that I vos some vunderful vild banimal. I'd advise yer jist to pull yerself together a bit, an to say no more about this here b'sness, if yer wouldn't ruffle my amiable temper. Vot are yer staring at ag'in, an' a trembling like a basin of jelly in convulsions?"

Beaufort tried to answer, but he could not, and an exclamation of horror escaped him, as he made a sign to Sam, which the latter was at a loss to understand.

"Vot d'yer mean?" he impatiently demanded, and with a half muttered oath, "vot the devil are yer pointing at in that here manner? Why, don't yer hexplain yerself?"

"'Tis there again," gasped forth the unhappy Beaufort in a hollow voice, and trembling more violently than before, "once more she comes to arouse the horrors of your guilty conscience, and to appal you with her ghastly sight. Look—look, and convince yourself."

The greatest fears of Sam Filcher were now excited, in spite of all his efforts to conquer them, and at the moment those fears were increased to an indescribable degree, for as Beaufort spoke he distinctly heard a solemn and unearthly groan close to him, a supernatural light illumined the spot on which he stood, and turning his head hastily round his eyes once more encountered the ghastly phantom of the murdered old woman standing close to his elbow, with her hollow eyes fixed upon him, and the whole expression of her pale features being such as could not fail to excite the greatest terror in even the most hardened and insensible breast.

The villain started back aghast, scarcely believing the evidence of his eyes, and all the hardihood, and revolting revelry he had so shortly before evinced, entirely forsaking him, while Beaufort had covered his face with his hands, unable to meet the awful sight, and every limb trembling with the most convulsive emotion.

But there the unearthly form stood, clearly revealed to the sight, and it was impossible that the guilty miscreant could again deceive himself, or imagine that he was labouring under a delusion of the senses.

His teeth chattered, his knees knocked together, and large drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead, but he could not remove his eyes from the fearful object before him, and as he continued to gaze, the more frightful and appalling did it appear to become.

"Am I mad?" at length the murderer found strength sufficient to exclaim, "or is it some trick got up to try an' frighten me? Am I going to be gammoned altogether? No, no, 'oman or devil, ghost or mortal, I will be satisfied."

Wound up to a pitch of desperation as he uttered these words, and still keeping his eyes rivetted upon the spectre, he moved towards it, but as he advanced it slowly and silently receded, with its hollow eyes still fixed upon him, and its looks retaining the same fearful and supernatural expression.

Beaufort again looked up, but remained fixed in the same attitude, and every faculty suspended in horror, but Filcher continued to follow the awful shade of his murdered victim, which, however, at length gradually

faded away until it had disappeared altogether.

For a minute or two Sam Filcher was transfixed with astonishment and alarm to the spot, and still continued to gaze towards the place where the spectre had vanished. Every doubt, every feeling of incredulity was removed, for it was utterly impossible that he could this time have been deceived, and the conscience of the wretched guilty man was at length awakened to all the horrors and agonies of remorse, which were plainly visible in the expression of his forbidding countenance.

Need we say that the excitement of Beaufort, was, if possible, even greater than his own? and it was some time ere he was at all enabled to recover himself; but at length with trembling footsteps and an expression of countenance which fully showed the terrible agitation of feelings under which he laboured, he approached his companion in crime, and placing his hand upon his arm, in a tremulous voice he said—

"You can no longer doubt, Filcher, and your hardened breast even, I see, is smote with terror. You dare no more treat this appalling event with scorn and levity. Let us away—let us away."

Filcher for a moment fixed upon him a ghastly and bewildered look, but could not give utterance to a single syllable, then grasping his wrist with convulsive emotion, and gazing vacantly and timidly around him as though he feared to encounter again the fearful object which had so distracted and appalled his senses, he drew him from the spot, once more penetrating into the dreary recesses of the forest, but seeming little to heed whither he was going.

It is needless to seek to describe the feelings that agitated the breasts of both the guilty men, for the reader will be able much better to imagine them; it may be sufficient to say that they were of the most torturing nature, and which it would be a difficult task to conquer.

They proceeded to some distance in silence, and as they did so, the darkness of the night, and the horrors of the place seemed to increase, and consequently the gloom and terror of their feelings, and this time at any rate, Sam Filcher could not, neither did he attempt to do so, at all conceal the fears under which he laboured, and which he had never remembered to have experienced before. Yet was he vexed with himself that he had suffered them to gain such powerful influence over him, and likewise that he was totally unable to conceal them from the observation of Beaufort.

But they at length again stopped to rest themselves, for they had proceeded with the same speed—probably urged by their terror

—that that they would have done had they feared pursuit, Beaufort looking earnestly and searchingly in his companion's face, said—

"Filcher, can you ever forget this appalling adventure? Are you not now convinced that our career of crime is fast drawing to a close, and that a terrible retribution awaits us?"

"Hush, hush," said Sam, in faint and tremulous tones, and looking fearfully around him, "say not a word more; I—I damme, I'm astonished, and blessed if I know what to make on it arter all. Why the devil should the old 'oman now trouble me? She had herself to thank for everything. If she'd not been so sarcy an so threatening why she might have been living now. I can't help it, if she vould perwoke me to it, an' yer knows my temper, captain?"

"Yes, for that of a savage, of a monster," replied Beaufort, "and the more I think of the dreadful crimes you have committed, and in which you have forced me to become an accomplice, I shudder with horror."

"Hold yer tongue," said Filcher, with a frown, I suppose as how yer thinks yerve got the advantage of me now, cos I've showed a little bit of fear. But don't yer go for to make not no mistake, my fine feller, Sam Filcher's pluck is not all gone keville yet, an' don't yer try any nonsense vith him, cos yer see as how he's not in the humour to stand it. As for being afeard—psha! that's all stuff, a glass or two of grog will set me all to rights ag'in, I dare say, and that here I'm determined to have a skinful of as soon as I can get it."

"Think not that drink will ever drown the voice of conscience, Filcher," returned Beaufort, or banish from your memory the awful events of this evening?"

"Damn yer," cried Sam Filcher, fiercely, and struggling to conquer the other feelings that were excited in his breast, "vill yer cease? if yer don't," he added, with a threatening look, "it vill be the vorse for yer. Conscience be damned, I say again; I'm not to be frightened at trifles."

"Hardened man," said Beaufort, "the time will come, depend upon it, when you will be awakened to reason and to all the horrors of your present situation."

"There no more preaching, I say," commanded Sam, impatiently, "at any rate, I'm not a going to drop down upon my luck arter all these years, yer may take my word for that. Ve can't hexpect that the game will last for ever, but let's make the best use on it, while it continues, an' never say die till yer dead. Kim along, I feels myself all right ag'in now; I vonder vot it vos as could make me so preshus narvous."

Sam did endeavour to re-assume his usual

recklessness of demeanour, but it was with a very bad grace he did so, and Beaufort not taking the trouble to remonstrate with him further, for it would have been a useless waste of time and breath, followed him from the spot, and they continued on their way through the intricate forest in silence, Filcher, however, making one or two ineffectual attempts to get up a whistle, or to sing the burthen of one of the numerous flash ditties with which he prided himself on being acquainted.

It was all to no purpose, however, that the ruffian tried to regain his usual spirits, or to banish from his memory the extraordinary and awful events of the evening, they were not so easily to be disposed of, and as they journeyed on, he gave himself up involuntarily to a train of gloomy meditations such as had never before occurred to him, and which he could not bring to any satisfactory conclusion in his own mind, or banish them from it altogether.

Frequently he looked timidly but anxiously around him, almost expecting, yet fearing to behold the awful features of the spectre fixed upon him, and sometimes he could imagine that he heard her solemn and unearthly voice breathing in his ears the same terrible words which she had uttered in her dying moments and which could never be effaced from his memory.

So powerful were the effects of these ideas upon the villain's mind, that he found it almost impossible to control them, or to conceal them from the observation of Beaufort, who could not but feel some degree of satisfaction at the mental agony which the desperate villain was evidently now for the first time enduring. But he did not venture to make any remark, which he knew would only serve to excite Filcher's rage, and in all probability be productive of the most disagreeable consequences to himself.

CHAPTER CXXX.

LORD SELBORNE'S ANGUISH.—HENRY AND PHOEBE.

To return to the unfortunate nobleman, Lord Selborne, whom we left in a state of utter insensibility from the effects of the blow which the brutal ruffian Sam Filcher had dealt him previous to committing the robbery.

Following so soon after the violence inflicted upon him in the excitement of his feelings by Henry Ashford, it had a doubly painful effect, and he remained in the same inanimate and unconscious state for some time, and without giving the least signs of

recovering. But at length the coolness of the night breeze partially revived him, and opening his eyes, and with some difficulty raising himself on his elbow, he gazed around him in amazement and confusion, unable at first to bring to his recollection what had taken place, or by what means he had fallen into the situation in which he now found himself.

It appeared that previous to his encountering Sam Filcher and Beaufort, he had wandered to some short distance from the scene of his painfully affecting interview with Phoebe, and was now on a lonely spot apart from the road which led to Henry Ashford's farm.

All the particulars of the strange and exciting events which had taken place in the last hour or two, however, quickly recurred to his memory, and the anguish of his feelings, created by the different and conflicting thoughts that crowded so tumultuously upon his brain, may be far better imagined than described, but they were such as almost to drive him to madness.

The meeting with the villains Filcher and Beaufort coming so quick upon the interview between himself and Phoebe, and her lover all added to his emotions, and for a few minutes his brain was so bewildered that he could not arrange his thoughts into anything like order.

The appearance of the ruffians, and which always occurred at a time when he had no assistance at hand to frustrate their nefarious designs, and to secure them, and to prevent them from the perpetration of future outrages, ever produced the most painful effects on his mind, by recalling in still more torturing and vivid colours to his memory the events of the past, and creating the most dismal forebodings for the future, for they were ever the harbingers of evil, and he had always noticed that fresh misfortunes to himself invariably followed any encounter he might have with them.

But the scene with our heroine and Henry Ashford, completely superseded every other feeling in his mind, and he continued to dwell upon it with the most poignant anguish and despair.

Every word which Phoebe had uttered at that meeting rushed upon his memory with overwhelming force; he keenly felt how justly he had deserved the reproaches she had heaped upon him, and he now wondered at his own temerity in again venturing to obtrude himself upon the presence, and his boldness and presumption in seeking to obtain the forgiveness of one who it was utterly impossible could view him with any other feelings but those of disgust, scorn, and hatred, for wrongs which nothing could repair, no penitence could ever atone for.

And then the sudden appearance of Henry Ashford at such a critical juncture, and the erroneous impression it was likely to create in his mind, causing the greatest anxiety to the former and Phoebe, added to the torture and anxiety of Lord Selborne, rendering him even still more wretched than he otherwise would have been.

Again he deeply regretted the course he had pursued, and the interview he had so rashly sought and obtained, and he could not but now believe all those wild thoughts and expectations he had ventured to encourage to be at an end, and that he had nothing henceforth to anticipate than the greatest misery and unceasing despair.

But the lateness of the hour, and the alarm which the length of his absence would naturally excite at the inn, now aroused him and showed him the necessity of retracing his footsteps without delay, and he therefore endeavoured to gather himself to his feet, but his strength seemed to be exhausted in a most remarkable manner, his limbs failed him, a strange giddiness seized upon his brain, and with a faint cry he again sunk back upon the earth, powerless and almost insensible. His mind was bewildered, and his recollection of what had taken place became vague and confused, while all power to remove from the place where he was denied him, and it seemed not at all unlikely that he would have to remain there all night, or till his strength at any rate should be in some measure restored, or accident might bring some one to his assistance.

More than a quarter of an hour had elapsed, when the sound of approaching footsteps smote his ears and raising his head, and looking in the direction from whence they proceeded, he beheld by the faint light which the moon now shed, that it was the form of a man, and he uttered a cry as loud as he could in order that he might attract his attention to the spot, where he was helplessly lying.

This had the desired effect, and the man hastily advanced towards him, and an exclamation of astonishment and mingled fear and satisfaction escaped him on recognising his lordship, for it was his faithful servant William, who alarmed at his protracted absence from the inn, fearing that something serious had happened to him, and knowing the errand that he had gone upon, had come forth in search of him, having resolved, in the event of not meeting with him, on venturing to the farm to make inquiries after him, risking the reception he was likely to meet with there.

The astonishment and gratification of his lordship on beholding him, was equal to that which William felt, and he endeavoured to speak, and to dissipate the fears which would

be naturally excited on beholding him in such a singular situation, but he was unable to do so, and sunk back exhausted with the efforts he had made.

William's apprehensions were now more than ever excited, for the looks of his noble master were pale, wild, and agitated, and the helpless condition in which he had found him convinced him that something of a more serious nature than he had the power to explain had happened.

He quickly raised him from the earth, and supporting him in his arms, he now perceived that his lordship's face was swollen and discoloured, as if from violent blows, moreover that his pockets were turned inside out, and his clothes otherwise disordered, showing beyond a doubt that he had been robbed and otherwise maltreated.

It was some distance from the place where they were to the inn, and William regretted that he had not thought to bring with him some assistance, as it would be a difficult task for him to convey his master there alone, and at present he seemed too faint to help himself in any way.

But it was useless to hesitate, and his lordship might really have received such injuries as to render the least delay dangerous, and William was therefore about to muster all his strength and resolution for the task, when his master by dint of considerable exertion, so far recovered himself as to be able to speak, much to the gratification and relief of his faithful attendant, and who anxiously inquired what had taken place, and whether his lordship had received any serious injury.

"Be not alarmed, William," replied his master, in a faint melancholy tone of voice, "I am suffering more from the excitement of my feelings than anything else, though I have been robbed, and experienced the most brutal violence from the hands of the notorious miscreant Filcher, and his base associate in crime Beaufort."

"Ah, my lord," returned the astonished William, "is it possible that the villains have again dared to molest you, and to commit so infamous an outrage against you? When will those wretches meet with the punishment which their crimes have so long and justly merited? But how fortunate is it that you have by the interposition of providence, been allowed to escape with your life."

"Life," repeated the unhappy nobleman, with a sigh, "alas, William, it is no longer valuable to me, it has, in fact, long been an insupportable burthen which it would be a mercy and relief to me to get rid of, and I have heard that to-night which has added to my misery, and driven me to complete despair."

William looked at his unfortunate master

with an expression of the deepest sympathy, for he readily guessed to what he alluded; but he did not presume to offer an observation upon so delicate and painful a subject; and again eagerly inquired of his lordship whether he thought that with his assistance, he should now be able to walk to the inn.

"Yes, William," replied his master, "I feel much better now; it was merely a faintness and weakness that came over me, and for a time suspended all my faculties. With the support of your arm I have no doubt I shall be able to walk to the inn without much difficulty."

They immediately moved slowly from the spot, and his lordship as they departed, cast one lingering look in the direction of the farm, but which was now buried in profound darkness.

His lordship's feeble condition would, however, only enable him to walk slowly, and they were therefore some time before they came in sight of the inn, without exchanging a single observation; for the mind of Lord Selborne was too fully occupied with painful thoughts to suffer him to enter into conversation; and William—who, however, felt most keenly for the agony of mind which he was convinced he was enduring—did not venture to interrupt him in his meditations.

Lord Selborne, however, passed a restless night. He had suffered much from the violence he had received at the hands of the ruffian Filcher, and exposure to the night air; but the sufferings of his mind were even more severe, and at times he was quite delirious, and his wild ravings of Phoebe, and the bitter expressions of his remorse, were quite melancholy to hear.

The physician feared that he had received a shock which would take him some days to recover from; and he proved to be perfectly right in his conjectures, for, for more than a week his lordship was confined to his chamber, and at times exhibited symptoms which excited the most serious apprehensions in the breasts of those who were in attendance upon him.

It was quite evident that such frequent and severe shocks to the system, must ultimately have a most fatal effect upon a constitution so much injured, nay, completely shattered by mental anxiety and physical suffering as his lordship's; he knew it, he felt it, and it was with a morbid, gloomy kind of satisfaction that he did so: for he looked forward to death as a happy release from, and the termination of a career of misery which had become insupportable, and in which he now abandoned all hope of any circumstance whatever being able to effect a favourable change.

What indeed was there now to cause him to cling to existence? Everything had be-

come hateful to him! Had he not become hateful to himself and everybody else? Was he not, in fact, one of the most isolated, wretched, and hopeless of human beings? Without one consoling reflection to fall back upon—without one sincere friend in the world to sympathise with him in the heavy sorrows that affected him, or to offer him a word of hope or consolation in the midst of his despair. He was; and therefore to continue to live was only to linger on in all the horror and anguish of mind that must ultimately drive him to madness.

What now were wealth or title to him? Shadows, baubles, bitter mockeries, which he had long since learned to despise, for they could not purchase one moment's peace, or drown for an instant the dread voice of conscience, which continually reproached him with the past, and drove his brain to distraction.

He had, for the last time, as he firmly believed, seen his unfortunate victim, and that torturing interview, never to be forgotten, had sealed his doom. She had said the fatal word, which had completely annihilated every hope that he might still fondly have cherished in his breast, and he felt himself accursed of heaven and mankind.

Such were the distracting thoughts that constantly haunted the unhappy nobleman, and which every hour made the heavy burden of his cares, and sorrows, and anxieties the more torturing and insupportable; and from which it did not now appear at all likely that anything would be able to relieve him.

But what was the scene which occurred between our heroine and Henry Ashford at the farm, when the former again revived to sensibility, and found herself supported in the arms of the amiable Amy, and her brother kneeling before her, and gazing up in her face with looks of the utmost distraction?

It will be a difficult task to describe it, but it may be easily imagined after what had taken place, and the rash words of suspicion to which Henry in the excitement of his feelings had given utterance.

At first she gazed at him with her usual ardent looks of affection, but suddenly all that had taken place seemed to flash upon her recollection with overwhelming effect, and hastily withdrawing her hand which Henry had held in his, and averting her looks, she burst into a violent flood of tears.

And how great was now the agony of mind which Henry endured, and how bitterly did he reproach himself for the mad feelings of jealousy and suspicion to which he had been excited, and unjust aspersions he had dared to cast upon her truth and honour, on beholding her clasped in the arms of Lord Selborne. He would have

given anything could he but have recalled the hasty observations he had made use of, and which it was but too evident had painfully wounded the feelings of Phoebe, and for which he knew not what apology to make, what atonement to offer.

It was these emotions that for a few minutes kept Henry silent, and our heroine continued to avert her looks and to weep bitterly; for she had indeed received a wound which she had never supposed it possible for Henry to inflict.

But at length Henry sufficiently recovered himself to again take the hand of Phoebe in his, and while he pressed it with the fondest fervour to his bosom, in a voice which must have fully convinced her of the sincerity of his words, and the agonising emotions which at that time agitated his breast, he said—

“Oh, Phoebe, dearest Phoebe, in what language can I describe the anguish of my feelings to see you thus; and to know that I, by the rash words my tongue gave utterance to, have been the unhappy cause of all? I must have been mad for a moment to suffer such unjust thoughts to enter my mind, or to speak one word that could cause your gentle bosom a single pang. Can you forgive me? beloved Phoebe, can you forgive me, and endeavour to forget that I have ever so grossly committed myself?”

Phoebe looked at him through her tears, but her cheeks were pale, and her fair bosom heaved with the painful emotions which she could not restrain, as she sighed—

“Alas, Henry, surely it was most cruel and unjust to utter words that threw a doubt upon my conduct, and indirectly accuse me of infidelity and dishonour. Surely you have never observed anything in my conduct to excite such feelings and suspicions in your breast; and 'twas most ungenerous, most unjust of you for an instant to encourage them.”

“True, Phoebe,” returned Henry, “I acknowledge my error, and feel most heartily ashamed of myself. My brain was bewildered, and I know not what I said, madened as I was to behold you once more enfolded in the arms of your base and hated betrayer.”

“Ah,” exclaimed our heroine, with a look of mingled sorrow and reproach; “’tis there Henry that I feel your observations the more still more keenly; can you for a moment imagine that my meeting with Lord Selborne was otherwise than accidental; or doubt the bitter, the almost insupportable anguish it cost me; the scorn with which I treated his protestations of penitence and remorse, and his supplications for forgiveness, and the reproaches which I heaped upon him? If you can indeed thus cruelly doubt me, I feel myself no longer worthy of your love and

confidence, and though this poor heart must break in the effort, I at once absolve you from your vows, and resign myself to all the most horrible tortures of misery and despair.”

Sobs choked her further utterance, and she hid her face in the bosom of Amy, who was too deeply affected to interpose a word upon the painful subject.”

“Phoebe, dear Phoebe,” cried the distracted Henry, still retaining his hold of her hand, and his looks expressive of all the anguish which he so keenly felt, “do you seek to drive me mad, which the severity of your words are calculated to do? Doubt you, beloved girl—oh, it is impossible; I should loathe and despise myself if I believed that I now could do so. It must have been some strange infatuation, some wild delusion of the senses, which could for an instant have excited the feelings that I experienced, but most sincerely do I now repent it, and implore your forgiveness. Refuse me, and there is not a more wretched being in existence than Henry Ashford.”

Again he pressed her hand with indescribable fervour to his agitated bosom, and his heart palpitated so violently against his side that it seemed as if it would burst its tenement.

Our heroine once more raised her tearful eyes towards him, and fixing upon him one earnest look for a moment, which seemed as though it would penetrate into his very soul, with a burst of emotion which she could no longer control, she threw herself into his arms, and he strained her to his bosom with feelings which no language however powerful it might be, could properly portray.

For a short time the lovers were too much overwhelmed by their feelings to suffer them to give an expression to them in words, and Amy stood by and gazed upon them with feelings of the deepest interest and the warmest sympathy, but did not offer to interrupt them.

“My own fond and faithful Phoebe,” at length ejaculated Henry, as he raised her head from his shoulder, on which it had sunk, and gazed in her pale but beauteous face with looks of the most unbounded affection, “my earnest supplications have not then been in vain; you do forgive the rash and ungenerous words my tongue, in a moment of thoughtlessness and excitement, gave utterance to, and endeavour to banish from your mind the remembrance that they ever were spoken? Your looks, beloved girl, convince me that you do, you will, and I am once more happy. Let me but hear your lips pronounce the words, and my happiness will then indeed be complete?”

"Henry," returned our heroine, endeavouring to smile through her tears, "after what you have now said, and the fervent assurances you have given me, I am satisfied that the words you uttered could not have come from your heart, but must have been spoken in a moment of excitement, and I do indeed most sincerely pardon them, and will endeavour to blot them from my memory."

"Blessed words!" exclaimed the young man, rapturously, and again enfolding her in his fond embrace, "oh, what boundless feelings of joy do they impart to me, what a heavy burthen of care and sorrow do they remove from my breast. Dearest Phoebe, you are again mine, in every feeling of love and confidence, and never—never more will I utter one word that can cause your fond and faithful heart a single pang, or merit from your lips one word of reproach."

He pressed warm kisses of fervent affection upon her lips and cheeks, and locked in each other's arms for a few moments they gave uninterrupted indulgence to their fond and powerful emotions, and did not attempt to give utterance to a single word, for their hearts were too full to suffer either of them to do so.

But at length they became more calm, and after a mutual interchange of thoughts, at the earnest request of Henry Ashford and his sister, our heroine at once entered with considerable emotion, as might have been expected, into the particulars of the meeting between herself and the wretched Lord Selborne, and all that had passed at their painful interview, to which Henry and Amy listened with the most marked attention and the deepest interest.

"Dear Phoebe," observed the young farmer, when she had concluded, "how fully do I appreciate the feelings of anguish you must have experienced at a meeting so unexpected with that guilty man, from whose base artifices originated all those unexampled cares and sorrows you have so long and so unjustly had to undergo. Wretched, guilty man, if his penitence be indeed sincere—but in spite of all the charitable feelings I would fain entertain towards him, I can scarcely believe it to be so—how terrible indeed must be the anguish of remorse that racks him—how truly fearful must be the reflections that his goading and never sleeping conscience must present to him. But 'tis fit that one who has been the cause of so much misery and wretchedness to others should have to suffer severely himself. It is no more than a just punishment for his crimes. But no conduct of his can ever make sufficient atonement for the past."

"True—most true," replied his sister,

"the guilt which weighs upon his conscience is great, but still if his penitence is sincere and indeed after all that Phoebe has stated, I can hardly doubt that it is, his incessant agony of mind must indeed be most severe, and he is therefore in some measure to be pitied."

"Yes," coincided our heroine; "but his penitence and remorse, if even they emanate from his heart, alas, come too late. They can never repair the wrongs he has done—the ruin and desolation he has spread around—the dark clouds that he has cast upon my hopes and prospects, the torturing feelings of anguish, regret, and bitter self-reproach which he has caused me, and which must pursue me to the grave."

"For heaven's sake, Phoebe," said her lover, "oh, talk not thus I beseech you, for it racks my heart and distracts my brain to hear you. Surely that which you have already suffered, is more than sufficient for any errors that you have been guilty of, but into which you were unfortunately plunged by untoward circumstances, and not from any free will of your own. Again endeavour to forget the past, and look upon the sunny side of the future."

Phoebe shook her head mournfully, and a deep sigh escaped her bosom, as thoughts the most dismal and torturing arose upon her mind.

She would fain have followed the advice of her lover, but oh, how difficult was it to do so, especially under the peculiarly melancholy and disheartening circumstances in which she was situated.

Look upon the sunny side of the future! alas, what was there to stimulate her to do so? What hope to cheer her on? Was not all darkness? Could she think of her poor afflicted father, and knowing that his recovery was all but impossible, and more, that ever when transient reason enabled him to recognise her, it was but to spurn and to curse her as something loathsome, could she think of this, we say, and possibly admit one ray of sunshine to her mind? Was there hope or sunshine in the future?

"Oh, would that my betrayer had never more ventured to seek my presence," she ejaculated, "what torturing feelings has it rekindled in my breast. Pray heaven that I may never behold him again."

"To that wish," remarked Henry, "I most heartily respond; but after what has occurred at this interview, I trust that his lordship will never more shock and agonise your feelings, by appearing before you. One thing I most deeply regret, namely, that in the great excitement of my feelings, I should have been guilty of an act of violence, which, even under



other circumstances I could never have thought of committing. It was rash, it was imprudent, and uncalled for on my part, and I must not, I will not attempt to excuse myself. His lordship, however, I hope will retire from the neighbourhood, and henceforth seek that solitude and obscurity, which the unfortunate circumstances of his mispent life demands."

"Heaven grant that he may," said our heroine, fervently, "and that it may never more be my misfortune to encounter him. If his assertions were sincere, he will in future seek to avoid me, and thus prevent the repetition of a scene so torturing to us both. May heaven pardon him, as I will endeavour to do."

Henry returned no immediate answer, but at length endeavoured to change
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the subject which had now become so painful to them all; but Phoebe felt too agitated and dispirited to enter freely into further conversation, and after a short time, as it was getting late, they separated for the night, and Phoebe and Amy retired together.

CHAPTER CXXXI.

A CHAIN OF EVENTS.

WHEN alone in their chamber, our heroine and Amy again for a short time discussed the exciting events of the evening, but being unable to come to any satisfactory conclusion, and Phoebe

evincing uneasiness, the subject was abruptly dropped, and they retired to bed.

But it was sometime ere racking thoughts would permit sleep, "the balmy soother of all our woes," to close the eyelids of Phoebe, and all the painful circumstances of the evening once more passed in torturing review before her imagination.

To say that the evident compunction of the unfortunate Lord Selborne, and the terrible remorse he had exhibited, had left no impression of pity upon her mind would be wrong. His careworn looks, his distracted demeanour, his humiliating protestations and supplications, his emaciated form now bent with premature old age, all told too plainly the dreadful agony of mind he was and had been for some time enduring, to be mistaken or disputed, and even guilty as he had been, great as were the wrongs he had inflicted on her, and terrible as were the calamities his base conduct had been productive of, she could hardly help accusing herself of having been too severe in the answer she had made to his appeal to her for mercy and forgiveness, and the reproaches she had heaped upon him.

"But," she soliloquized, "why should I suffer this feeling of regret to enter my breast when I think of all the horrors, the shame, and degradation, his villany has brought upon me? Why should I entertain any other feeling but one of the most intense hatred towards the betrayer of mine innocence, the murderer of my unfortunate mother,—the destroyer of my aged father's reason? It is impossible that I can do so; but pity, forgiveness, for irreparable wrongs like these, oh, the very thought is mockery, and opposed to reason and justice. His punishment may be severe, but it is no more than he merits, and cannot equal the misery he has so cruelly and recklessly inflicted on the innocent victims of his guilt. Oh, would that I could banish him from my thoughts altogether, but Heaven, I pray thee, grant that I may never behold him again."

In spite of all, however, she could not but deeply regret the violence which the impetuosity of Henry's excited feelings, had led him to be guilty of, towards the wretched nobleman; and, notwithstanding the explanation which had taken place between them on the painful subject, the jealous suspicions that had been excited in her lover's breast, and which he had so warmly expressed on the occasion, wounded her to the heart, and she found it difficult

to reconcile it to her feelings, or to banish it from her memory altogether.

"If he can thus so readily doubt my truth and honor," she reflected; "it is evident that he cannot place that implicit confidence in me he has avowed, and without which, it is impossible that we can ever be happy together. Will he not reproach me with the past, and continually remind me of the way in which I then deceived him, and——But no, no, no," she hastily added, after a brief pause, "let me not think so meanly of him; let me banish such torturing and ungenerous ideas from my mind. Oh, Henry, how much I wrong your manly and noble nature, by entertaining them. Have you not ever testified by your conduct, the sincerity of your love, and sought to restore me to happiness by forgetfulness of the past, and in joyful anticipation of the future?—You have; and I must indeed be ungrateful not to remember it, or appreciate the feelings of love and constancy which prompted it. To you, dear Henry, and to your amiable sister, I owe a debt of gratitude, which it will be utterly impossible for me ever to repay, and when I cease to remember it, and with the feelings I am bound to do, may Heaven forsake me. In the midst of my heaviest afflictions, when I was a wretched outcast, despised, abandoned by all the world, what would have become of me had it not been for you?—To you am I indebted for my preservation from all the horrors by which I was then surrounded and threatened, and for protection and every affectionate care and attention since; and I must indeed be a wretch, unworthy of anything but scorn, if the remembrance of those weighty obligations should ever be banished from my mind, or cease to be warmly cherished in the deepest recesses of my heart. Dear Henry, I will no more venture to entertain a thought derogatory to your truth and honor, or give you cause for a moment, the fervour and sincerity of that passion with which your manly virtues have inspired me."

These thoughts at once banished the gloomy and unpleasant feelings which had previously held possession of her breast, and imparted that degree of consolation which, under all the circumstances she so much required, and shortly afterwards sleep descended upon her eyelids.

* * * *

The reader will now be pleased to imagine three more months to have elapsed since the events that have been recorded in the foregoing pages had taken place, during which period nothing of any particular importance had happened. But a chain of

rather startling events was now about to occur which we will at once proceed to relate.

The condition of poor old Mark Mayfield remained unchanged, in fact all hopes of his ultimate recovery from the fatal and unfortunate malady with which he was afflicted were now nearly abandoned, and our heroine had, by the exertions of her lover and his sister, almost learned to resign herself to the melancholy circumstances of the old man's fate, especially when she knew that everything that humanity could suggest was done for him, and that he wanted for nothing.

She saw no more of the wretched Lord Selborne since the evening recorded in the previous chapter, although she heard of his serious illness at the inn where he had put up during his sojourn in Yorkshire, and his ultimate departure to London, and, in spite of the other feelings that would arise in her breast, she could not help feeling some degree of pity for the sufferings to which he was now evidently exposed, both mental and bodily.

It was on a remarkably cold and dreary evening for the time of year, that the inmates of the farm separated at an earlier hour than usual, and Phoebe and Amy retired to their chamber for the night.

They had all suffered from a most extraordinary depression of spirits during the day, for which they could not easily account, and the most dismal forebodings of some approaching calamity haunted their minds, which even Henry himself found it impossible to conquer.

The inmates of the farm, as we have before stated, had retired to rest on the evening in question at an early hour, and all was wrapped in darkness and in silence.

It was one of those heavy, gloomy nights when a sort of torpidity seems to rest upon everything and everybody, and the whole face of nature wears a dismal, chilling aspect, frowning despair upon the unhappy, and rendering those who would fain have been happy cheerless and miserable.

Not a moon not a star was to be seen, dark and ominous clouds rolled across the sky, and but for the wind which ever and anon swept in hollow gusts through the foliage, and the different avenues around, a dead hush might be said to rest upon everything, and was calculated to excite the most gloomy feelings.

At that dismal hour, when every one seemed in utter disgust to have sought their chambers to sleep away, if possible, the misery of the night, the forms of two men, each of them carrying a formidable looking stick in his hand, and muffled up to the chin in top coats, might have been seen approaching slowly, and stealthily towards the farm,

ever and anon looking around them as though they suspected and feared that they were watched by somebody.

It was Sam Filcher and Beaufort; who ever since the eventful evening when we left them both in such a state of fear and excitement, after the supernatural appearance of the murdered woman, had been lurking in the neighbourhood, taking up their principal retreat at the haunt of infamy, in which they had sought shelter on the night of the snow-storm.

There was not much alteration in their personal appearance, the same villanous expression characterized the features of Sam Filcher, and all signs of that terror of conscience, which he evinced after the awful adventure, to which we have above alluded, had entirely disappeared.

If anything Beaufort seemed to have improved in looks and general demeanour, the nervous and conscience stricken feelings that at one time constantly agitated him, and rendered his life an insupportable burthen to him, and so frequently excited the coarse sarcasm and the rage of the hardened "Sprig of Myrtle," being apparently entirely overcome, and a recklessness nearly equal to that of his hardened associate in crime having taken its place.

To judge by the rubicund aspect of their countenances, and the expression of their eyes, they were both in a pretty considerable state of inebriation, Beaufort more so than his companion, or at least more fully betraying it. But it was quite evident that they had worked themselves up to that pitch of excitement and determination that rendered them fit for the undertaking and the accomplishment of any task, however desperate.

Having arrived to within a few paces of the farm, they stopped, and again looked cautiously around them, but perceiving no one near them or within sight, they appeared the more emboldened to proceed, and advanced close to the gate which led into the farm-yard.

"Vell," remarked Sam, "here ve air, pretty vell at the end ov our journey. The mansion ov Skevire Stubbles, which is the scene ov our hintended crack, is not much more than a stone's throw from here. How's yer pluck now, Captain?"

"All right," answered Beaufort, with a look and in a tone of determination, which till lately had been strangers to him; "I feel fit for anything."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Sam Filcher, approvingly, "that here's summat like, old feller, an' it does my wery heart good to hear yer. No kevalms ov conscience, and all that here nonsense now, eh?"

"Conscience be damned," returned Beaufort, "I'm not going to be such a fool as to suffer that to trouble me again. I am a villain, I know myself to be a villain, I acknowledge myself to be one, so there's an end of the matter. All that I can do is to endeavour to live as long as I can, to be as jolly as I can, and when my time arrives, (which I suppose it will, sooner or later,) to meet my fate as a man."

"Capital!" cried the delighted Sam Filcher, slapping him on the shoulder, and scarcely able to believe the evidence of his senses, so extraordinary was the change that had come over his guilty associate; "that's summat like, an' not no mistake, an' now I hadmires yer. This here's better than snivellin' an' funkin' about nuffin, take my vord for it. But I say, Captain."

"Well, what is it?"

"This here's the farm ov our ould friend Henry Ashford."

"Well, I know it is," replied Beaufort rather pettishly,—“do you think I'm blind?"

"In course not, unless it is blind drunk; ve've both on us had enuff to make us so."

"And what if we have?"

"Oh, nuffin, so much the better; ve're just primed for mischief; eh?"

"For business you mean."

"For bus'ness, disackly, that here's the vord."

"Well, what were you going to say about the farm?" demanded Beaufort, hastily.

"S'pose we takes a survey ov it," answered Sam.

"Of what use would it be for us to do that?" interrogated Beaufort, impatiently; "it would only delay time; besides, we have seen enough of the farm before."

"That here may be," observed Filcher, "very good; but I've got a hidea, which has jist struck me, an' yer must humour my whim; some good might turn up from it."

"Well," said Beaufort, carelessly, for the fumes of the liquor of which he had partaken so freely, now began to ascend with more powerful effect to his brain, "do as you like, I'm not at all particular now."

"All right," said Sam, "there's no von nigh to hobsarve us, so this way."

He advanced close to the gate of the farm yard, which simply opened with a latch, but suddenly stopped as a thought seemed suddenly to occur to him:

"What's the matter now?" interrogated Beaufort, impatiently.

"I vonder if they keeps a tyke in the yard?" said Sam.

"It's not at all unlikely," answered his companion, in the same careless tone as before.

"It 'll be rayther orkard, if they does," said Filcher; "howsomdever, ve'll chance it, anyhow. Ve've only got to make ourselves scarce as soon as possible, if ve diskivers that here to be the fact. Kim along."

Beaufort assumed a perfect air of stolid indifference, putting both his hands in his coat pockets, and his stick under his arm; and Sam Filcher having opened the gate, he followed him into the yard, advancing a few paces towards the house, cautiously.

"All right," whispered Sam, "here's the kennel, but not no dog in it; come, that here is lucky."

They approached the house, and looked at the different windows in the front of it, and Sam also tried the door.

"All's kervite dark an' silent," remarked Sam, "an' the door's fast; they're all gone to roost, or else there's not no vun at home, that here's kervite sartain."

"And suppose it is," returned Beaufort. "What of that? What notion have you got into your head now?"

"Can't yer gress?"

"No."

"Ve owe Henry Ashford a bit ov a grudge, don't ve?" said the villain.

"Yes: what then?"

"He would scrag us if he could."

"No doubt of it."

"It wouldn't be a bad thing, if ve vos to have a bit of rewenge."

"And how's that to be accomplished?" demanded Beaufort, with the most astonishing apathy; in fact, whether from the influence of drink or not, in fact, his brain seeming completely stupified and bewildered at the time.

"If ve could only obtain a hentrance to the house," replied Filcher, "ve should see."

"It might be attended with danger."

"Ye're not a goin' to guv vay to fear ag'in, air yer?" demanded Sam.

"No, no," replied his companion, impatiently, "go on; I am agreeable to anything."

Sam Filcher said no more, but cautiously led the way to the back of the house, everything seeming to favour the guilty designs of the villains, and which appear to have been suggested by Sam, and agreed to by Beaufort in complete wantonness.

All was dark and silent as in the front of the premises, and Sam, having first taken a survey, advanced boldly to a low door at one corner of the building, which he tried, and to his no small amazement and gratification, found it to be unfastened.

"Vell, this here is lucky," he said; "any von vould think as how they knowed ve vos coming, an' vished to haccomodate us. Now then, captain," he added, in a whisper, "caution—caution!"

"All right," replied Beaufort, in the same under tone, and following his daring associate into the passage.

Filcher now drew a dark lantern from his pocket, and lighted it from a bottle of phosphorus which he had with him; also a bunch of skeleton keys, and then led the way along the passage to the staircase at the end of it, which he immediately began to ascend, Beaufort following him with silent footsteps.

After ascending a couple of flights of stairs, they stopped at the door of a room, and listening, could hear the thick breathing of some one in their sleep.

"The're sound enough, whoever they air," whispered Sam; "ve'll try our luck here by vay of a beginnin'."

"Mind, Sam," also whispered Beaufort, "no bloodshed."

"Not if ve can't help it," said Sam, and he immediately proceeded to try the door which was locked.

"All right," he muttered, "I'll soon get over that here difficulty."

He commenced operations immediately, and cautiously, with one of the skeleton keys, and the lock yielded to it almost without an effort.

Filcher opened the door silently, (Beaufort being behind him,) and peeped into the chamber, and towards the bed especially, on which Henry Ashford was sleeping soundly.

"It's him," said Sam, in a whisper, "'tis our young friend. He's fast enough, so ve'd better make the best use of our time."

Beaufort impatiently motioned him to proceed, with a significant look, and they both then entered the chamber on tiptoe, Sam advancing towards a small writing desk, standing on a table in one corner of the room, and which had instantly caught his attention on entering.

No less to the surprise than the gratification of both the villains, the key of the desk was in the lock, Henry, who still slept soundly, probably having deposited something therein previous to retiring to rest.

CHAPTER CXXXII.

AN ACT OF INCENDIARISM.

THERE was not a moment, of course, to be lost, so while Beaufort anxiously watched the sleeper, who however gave not the least

signs of waking; Sam Filcher quickly opened the desk, and glanced eagerly at the contents.

The first things that his eyes fell upon, and a most welcome and gratifying sight, it need not be said, was a bundle of bank notes, (which Henry had only received that day, in payment of several large bills that had been due to him,) and a canvas bag, containing gold and silver to a considerable amount, and which the villain immediately deposited in his pocket, with a chuckle of exultation.

He then hastily examined the contents of the desk further, but without finding anything else of value, and Beaufort motioned him away, and towards the door, which he obeyed, and they both retired from the chamber, as quietly as they had entered it, Henry Ashford still sleeping as soundly as ever.

"Vell, this is a slice ov luck, an' not no mistake," said Sam, in a whisper, "who'd hav' thought now, that the young man vould hav' kept his blunt so handy for our hacceptance? 'Twas verry kind ov him."

"True," coincided Beaufort, speaking in the same low and cautious tone; "but let us begone while we're safe."

"Vot, afore ve've hexamined the other rooms?"

"Yes."

"I dont see it."

"Perhaps not, but I do."

"How?" asked Sam, impatiently and discontently.

"We've been lucky, as you say, without much difficulty," replied Beaufort; "the loss of this large sum of money will probably be the ruin of Henry Ashford, and we ought to be satisfied without running any further risk. Come, let us begone, without any more delay."

"All's keviet," said Sam, "there's not nuffin to fear, so ve mav as vell try our luck a little further. Who knows vot ve might drop upon?"

"No, no," returned Beaufort, resolutely, and grasping his arm: "let us away before any danger threatens us."

"Vell," said Filcher, reluctantly, "I s'pose I must humour yer for vonce, though I don't much fancy doing so."

He then followed Beaufort with hesitating though cautious steps, and they quickly again found themselves in the farm yard.

Suddenly a feeling of regret for the cruel robbery they had just perpetrated (and which would most likely ruin the prospects of Henry Ashford, and reduce him to the greatest state of misery), came over Beaufort, and pausing to reflect the villain Filcher had got a little in

advance of him, and his mind was too abstracted to take any notice of him.

But suddenly he was startled by observing a broad glare of light immediately before the spot on which he was standing, and looking hastily to ascertain the cause, and was thunderstruck on beholding the miscreant Filcher stooping down by the side of a haystack which immediately adjoined one angle of the farm, and which he had just set fire to by the means of a lighted match.

Horrorstruck, Beaufort rushed forward, and with his stick made a vain effort to knock the ignited part of the stack away, and thus prevent the progress of the flames.

"Infernal scoundrel! fiend that you must be," exclaimed the enraged, and now perfectly sobered Beaufort, "what have you done?—what fearful, what accursed malice could tempt you to this?"

"Vell," answered the hardened wretch, with the most perfect coolness and indifference, "I can't say disa'oly; the whim seized me all at once, and so I did it, that here's all about it."

"Monster," said Beaufort, "and for which you deserve to be hanged to the loftiest branch of the nearest tree immediately.

"It's all wery fine," retorted Sam, "but who's to do it I should like to know. Ha! ha! ha! my eyes! shan't ve have a preshus flare up presently."

"The flames will reach the house," cried the excited Beaufort, "and if they are not aroused from their sleep, all the inmates must perish. Let us immediately raise the alarm."

"Walker!" returned Filcher; "vot blow the gaff on ourselves? Air yer gone mad or silly? Come along; the best thing as ve can do is to get out ov this here as soon as ve can, for there'll be all the world here presently, an' ve might stand a wery fair chance ov bein' grabbed. My preshus eyes! who'd hav' thought it vould have blazed away so in no time at all?—but 'tvas the vind as did it, I s'pose."

"What a monstrous, wanton crime is this," said Beaufort, as he viewed with horror the frightful progress of the flames, which shot up to a tremendous height, illuminating the country for miles around, and had already caught one portion of the building; "oh, Filcher, what a cold-blooded villain you must be."

"Praps so," replied Sam; "but ve von't stand argifyin' that here p'int jist now. I hears the shouts of the people comin' here, so I means to step it like von o'clock. Yer may stay here to be cotch'd if yer likes, an' ve damned."

As Sam Filcher thus spoke, he took to

his heels and hurriedly quitted the scene of destruction caused by his own hands.

Beaufort cast one more look at the fierce flames, which had now attained a truly terrific ascendancy, and threatened the quick and total destruction of all within their devouring reach; but suddenly the loud and terrified cries of the people approaching from all parts of the surrounding country, smote his ears, and arousing him to a full sense of his own danger, he precipitately fled from the spot, in the same direction which Filcher had taken, and with whom, panting for breath, and filled with terror, he soon came up.

"A hellish deed your accursed hands has perpetrated," he said; "see the flames now envelope the house, and it is almost impossible for any of the unfortunate inmates to escape the devouring element."

"So much the vorser for them," said Filcher; "but it's no use standin' here a snivellin' about it. The job's done now, an' it can't be undone, so ve must make the best ov it, and be found missin' as soon as possibel, afore ve're diskiver'd. My eyes, vot a blaze it is to sure. It lights up the 'ole blessed place, an' makes everything wissibel. Holloa!"

"What's the matter?"

"They've twiggd us; don't yer see 'em comin'?" Put yer best leg for'ard, Captain, or it's all U. P. with us to a dead certainty. This here vay, ve may dodge 'em among the trees."

Beaufort cast a hurried and fearful glance in the direction to which Sam Filcher pointed, and then beheld in the lurid reflection of the fire, the forms of several men hastily approaching across the fields in evident pursuit; and he therefore followed the miscreant Filcher with all the speed he could.

CHAPTER CXXXIII.

THE FLIGHT. THE NARROW ESCAPE.

FEAR adding speed to their heels, the two villains pursued their flight with the greatest precipitation, and plunging, (as Sam had suggested), among the trees, which happened to grow near in abundance, they lost sight of those whom they imagined to be in pursuit of them.

Beaufort, as may be imagined, was in the greatest state of terror, but neither himself or Filcher ventured to say a word until they had got to some considerable distance from the scene of conflagration, when they again paused to take breath, and Sam Filcher said:—

"Vell, I think ve've given 'em the go-by, now, Captain, eh?"

"Filcher," returned Beaufort, fixing upon him a look of the utmost disgust and horror, "you are a villain of the deepest dye; a monster whose only delight is in effecting the misery of his fellow creatures, and in perpetrating acts of atrocity sufficient to make humanity shudder."

"Vell, that here's a wery hexillint kracter to recommend a cove, I must say," coolly replied the ruffian with a coarse laugh; "but I s'pose I vos born so."

"What demon could have incited you to so monstrous and dreadful a deed?" said Beaufort, with a shudder.

"There," replied Filcher, impatiently, and in surly tones, "you've ax't me that here vonce afore, an' I told yer, it vos a whim as seized me. That's all I can say about it. Howsomdever, ve've got the svag, that here's lucky, an' if ve only manages to escape, ve can enjoy——"

"Heartless miscreant," said Beaufort with increased looks of horror and disgust.

"Hold hard, old feller," cried Sam with a threatening look, "ye're comin' it pretty stiff, I think, an' no gammon; better langidge, if yer please, or yer an' I might happen to fall out, an' that here wouldn't be wery pleasant to not nayther on us."

"This night," observed Beaufort, undaunted by his threats, "you will have added wholesale and wanton murder to the long catalouge of your other hideous crimes; for, quick as the flames enveloped the premises, it would be next to a miracle if any of the unfortunate inmates should escape. Phoebe, Amy, and Henry may all perish."

"Vell, its a bad job," said Filcher, with affected remorse, "an' I'm sorry for it, that's all I can say about it."

"Could you not be satisfied with the robbery? what occasion was there for this additional and horrible crime?"

"I don't know."

"I was a fool and a villain to listen to your persuasions, and to take a willing part in the burglary."

"Vell, I can't help that," returned Filcher, "but yer vos a villin, yer know."

Beaufort returned no answer to this, for his mind was in too great a state of excitement to suffer him to do so.

From the spot on which they now stood which was elevated ground, he could obtain a distinct view of the awful conflagration, which he saw was now raging with terrific fury, the whole of the farm being enveloped in flames from the ground floor to the roof, and showing that its total destruction was inevitable, and the agony of the wretched,

guilty man, when he pictured to himself the horrible fate which had but too probably befallen the whole of the unfortunate inmates, wrapped as they were in sleep at the time of the commencement of the fire, was most intense.

"There," said Filcher at last, impatiently, and in his usual brutal tones, "yer've looked keville long enuff, an' seem to think there's no danger in standin' here. But I can tell yer that the sooner ve gets far away from here the better. It's a tidy blaze to be sure, as I said afore, an' is vorth lookin' at."

"Hardened, heartless scoundrel," said Beaufort, "will nothing awaken you to a sense of shame and remorse?"

"Now cut it, vill yer?" said Sam, sternly, "I don't vant not none ov yer preachin' on the subject, I thought as how yer'd done vith that here long ago. Ah! hoff's the vord, I see."

"What's the matter?" demanded Beaufort, eagerly, "what is it that alarms you now?"

"Look," answered Filcher, pointing in a certain direction which was rendered quite distinct in the reflection from the fire; "if them here preshus ogles ov yourn has not gone blind, yer can see, an' have no casion to ax that keveshton."

Beaufort did indeed look anxiously and fearfully in the direction whither Sam pointed, and he then beheld again several men hurrying towards them, and who doubtless from the elevated position in which they stood had observed them; and alarmed, for they seemed at no great distance from them, he followed Sam Filcher, who had resumed his flight as quick as he could.

But the voices of their pursuers sounded distinctly in their ears, and they could almost imagine they heard the sound of their footsteps no great distance behind them.

"Damn it," said Sam, "they seems determined to hav' us any how, an' are gaining upon us, an' no mistake. This here vont do; come along, Captain, no skulkin' now, ve must run for our wery lives, an' the devil take the hindmost. They'll find it not keville so easy to take us us they think, I reckon; if the vorst comes to the vorst, ve're not without our barkers, an' ve shall know how to make good use ov 'em, on a pinch."

Beaufort shuddered at the idea of more bloodshed, but there was no time to waste in thought, for he could now hear plainly the footsteps of the men every moment gaining quickly upon them, and could almost distinguish the words they uttered.

Sam Filcher redoubled his speed, and Beaufort had to exert himself to the ut

most to keep up with him, which, however, he managed to do pretty well.

The sound of their pursuers' footsteps gradually died away, and Beaufort at length venturing to look back could perceive nothing of them, so that his fears were in some degree abated.

Sam Filcher diverged into a lonely path, which led in the direction of the old churchyard, and having proceeded some short distance further, he again ventured to stop to take breath, and to consult with his trembling companion what was best to be done.

"Yer look almost vinded, Captain," he observed, "yer hav'n't had sich a nice bit ov hexercise for many a day. I think ve've made 'em cry a' go at last. Now then, ould feller, don't be down-hearted, keep yer pecker up."

"Sam," said Beaufort, in a faint and agitated voice, "the events of this dreadful night can never more be erased from my memory, and depend upon it, they will but hasten our destruction—the ignominious fate which inevitably awaits us."

"Stuff," cried Filcher; "I don't believe not nuffin ov the sort, and it would be keville as vell if yer didn't nayther. Vot's the good ov meeting troubles half vay? I never seed sich a feller to drop down upon his luck in my life as yer air."

"This frightful act will be sure to create the greatest and most painful sensation," remarked Beaufort: "every exertion will be made to discover the atrocious perpetrators of it, and we cannot long expect to escape detection."

"Nonsense," replied Sam, "ve're right enuff if ve only escape to night. No von has yet recognized us, for our pursuers vere too far off to do so, an' who's to suspect us, I should like to know? Don't be down-hearted; Captain, ve shall soon get over this here job vell enuff, depend upon it. Our time's not come yet."

"It cannot much longer be delayed," said the conscience-stricken and trembling Beaufort; "a terrible retribution must at last overtake crimes so monstrous as ours."

"So yer said long ago," returned Sam Filcher, "ye're alwus a profesyin' in that sort ov vay, but it's never been fulfilled yet, an' bless'd if I think it ever vill be now."

"Sam," observed Beaufort, "this bravado is all assumed. You cannot deceive me, in spite of all that you may try to do so. Dare you imagine that so awful a miscreant as yourself will be suffered to escape for ever, the punishment due to his hideous crimes?"

"Psha! no more ov this here, I'm sick

on it. I don't trouble myself to think nuffin at all about it. I leaves everything to chance, an' that's the only vay to go through the world 'appy. But come, it's not no use tarryin' here, unless ve vonts some von to vait upon us. Ve shall be safe enuff when ve gets among our pals in the ould crib. This here bus'ness, howsumdever, has sp'ilt the job at Skevier Stubbles's to night; but ve'll not lose sight ov it on some other 'casion. Damme there they air ag'in, They've scouted us out;—don't yer hear 'em?"

Beaufort did indeed again hear the shouts of men at no great distance, though he could not perceive any one, and his fears increased.

"Now then, Captain," remarked Sam, "its no use vaitin' here till they pounces upon us. They means mischief, I see, so let us be off ag'in like a flash ov lighternin'."

Beaufort needed nothing further to urge him into immediate compliance with this request than the fear of apprehension; and he and Sam Filcher once more resumed their flight, making their way towards the old church-yard, which they could not very well avoid.

The lurid reflection of the fire still illuminated their path, although Beaufort felt convinced, from the rapidity with which the fierce flames had spread, carried and fanned as they had been by the wind, that the frightful work of destruction must by this time be complete, and the agony of his feelings when he thought of the probable awful fate of the unfortunate Phoebe and her friends, may be imagined.

No such thoughts, however, seemed to trouble the consummate villain Filcher, his only care and anxiety being for his own escape; and it is not at all unlikely, although he had always been remarkably active on his feet, that he never ran faster in his life than he did on that occasion, and Beaufort exerted himself in the same extraordinary manner.

The consequence was, that in a few seconds they reached the old churchyard, which now seemed to the terrified imagination of Beaufort to wear an aspect of tenfold solemnity, and his limbs trembled with fear, and he shuddered to look around him as he entered it.

Sam Filcher, however, scampered recklessly over the different graves, (as he fancied that he again heard the sounds of pursuit), until he reached an ancient tomb near the church behind which he crouched, fairly dead beat by the extraordinary exertions he had undergone, and Beaufort, his teeth chattering and his knees knocking together, followed his example.



"Vell," said Sam, after a pause to recover himself, "here ve air, an' here ve must remain for a time an' chance it; for blest if I can move an inch further till I've rested myself, let the konsekenses be vwhatever they may. Ve're given the fellers a pretty tidy chase, an' no mistake, an' they must be good pluck'd uns if they arn't tired out. Howsomdever, if they comes, ve must make good use of our pistols, for it's not likely that ve're going to be taken arter all this here trouble. I say, captain, how kever yer look. Now any von as didn't know yer, as vell as I do, would take yer to be afeared. I never seed a better himitashun, I must say."

"Forbear," returned the disgusted and agitated Beaufort, "I am not in the humour to listen to your brutal taunts and sarcasms, neither is this the time or place for them."

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"Oh, very well, as yer like," said Sam, carelessly, "anything to make it agreeable. How the death's heads upon the old tombstones seems to grin upon us in the red reflectshun from the fire."

"Wretch," gasped forth the terrified Beaufort, staring aghast upon him, "dare you thus venture to talk in this awful place, and so near the grave of that poor old woman whose unfortunate daughter you have this night probably consigned to so dreadful a fate?"

"Bah," returned Filcher, in the same hardened and reckless manner as before, "d'yer think I'm so weak a fool as yerself to be frightened by my own shadder? Not I. But hush, silence, don't breathe; I hear some one coming; yes, an' see there they air a vinding of their vay among the old tomb-

stones, like so many ghostesses. It's them as is in search of us, I dare say. Ve must stick to our post an' chance it. Stoop down an' conceal yerself, an' if they comes too near an' is likely to diskiver us, ve must not forget to make good use of our pistols, and that's all about it."

Trembling with the most cowardly fear, and giving himself up for lost, the wretched Beaufort cast a hasty glance in the direction which Sam had intimated, and he then beheld several men—the same, no doubt, that they had before seen in pursuit of them—wending their way through the church-yard towards the right, and searching minutely every spot as they approached.

Sam pulled him down behind the tomb, muttering an oath as he did so, but at the same time watching himself narrowly and cautiously the actions of the men, with his pistols ready in case of any immediate danger presenting itself.

"All right," he whispered to Beaufort, "they haven't keville sich a strong scent as I thought they had. They're sarching everywhere but—"

"Hush," continued Beaufort, fearfully, "we know not who may be at hand to overhear us. The least sound might betray us."

"Psha," returned Sam Filcher, impatiently and scornfully, "I tells yer as how there's not nuffin of the sort to fear. There don't yer see that they're taken keville a contrary direction to that in which ve air? An' very wise on 'em, too, it is, if they only know'd it, for I should sartinly be blegged to make good use of my pistols if they didn't keep a respectful distance."

"Caution," again whispered Beaufort, "they seem to have changed their mind, and are now coming this way; I beg of you, Sam, not to use your pistols till the last emergency, and then only to alarm them, and cover our retreat."

"There, hold yer tongue," replied the ruffian, "I wants none of yer advice. I'd only jist inform yer for yer consolashun, that if yer don't use them pistols of your'n, or show any signs of flinching, I shall be under the painful necessity of lading a bullet in that preshus head of yourn."

All this was said in tones so low that they could scarcely have amounted to a murmur, and could not have been heard at even the slightest distance, but not a word escaped the ears of Beaufort, who trembled more violently than before, for he well knew from experience, how fully capable the villain was in putting any threats he uttered into execution.

The men now changed their direction, and in doing so they passed so near the tomb behind which Filcher and his companion were concealed that they could plainly distinguish

what they said, and the former grasped his pistols more determinedly.

"The scoundrels certainly entered the church-yard," remarked one of the men but they are no where to be seen, and must have made good their retreat from it."

"Yes," coincided another, "no doubt they saw us, and did not think it prudent to await our arrival. We may as well leave this place, and pursue our search further. They may not yet be able to escape us."

This advice was immediately taken and followed, the men leaving the church-yard by an opposite outlet, much to the relief of Beaufort.

"Good night, my flowers," said Sam, when they were gone; "it strikes me as how yer'll be disappointed this here round. Ha, ha, ha! how preshus green they must have been not to search here. It's lucky for 'em as they didn't though, cos if they had, they'd have met vith sich a varm reception as they didn't no bargain for, I dare say. Now then, captain, pull yerself together ag'in, for the sooner ve're off the better. Yer seed the way they took, so ve shall know which way to go also. Kim along."

Beaufort complied, and Sam Filcher, after having again looked cautiously around the church-yard to see that no one was lurking about, led the way, taking, of course, a contrary direction to that in which their pursuers had proceeded, and they quickly found themselves for the present apparently out of the reach of danger, for not the least signs of a human being could they discover as far as their eyes could trace

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

THE FLIGHT CONTINUED.

"Now, captain," said Sam Filcher, after they had proceeded some distance towards the desolate heath, where the dreadful murder of the poor old gipsy sybil had been penetrated, and which they could not avoid altogether, on the way to the place of their destination, "jist try an rouse that chicken heart of yourn into summat like pluck, vill yer? Ve're all right now, the coast is keville clear, an' ve've nuffin more to fear, that here is if ve only makes the best use of our time, and don't let the grass grow under our feet."

"It was a monstrous, wanton crime, Sam," said Beaufort.

"Yer at it ag'in, air yer?" returned Sam, with a frown and a threatening look, "yer'd better mind vot yer about."

"Filcher," said his unhappy companion, "you may threaten me, if you please, but I

will not be intimidated. I must and will speak what I think. I repeat it was a frightful deed, and cannot fail to create the greatest sensation in the country.

"An' vot if it does?" interrogated Sam, carelessly.

"Every vigilance," replied Beaufort, "is certain to be used to detect the perpetrators of so hideous a crime, and bring them to justice."

"No doubt on it," said Sam, "an' vot of that here? Who the devil's to suspect us, I should like to know, when there vos no von nigh at the time but ourselves? Air ve to be blamed for everything? Besides, ain't ve alwus lucky? Ve ain't been cotch'd yet, 'cept that time ve happend to get lagged, an' that vos a haccident."

"It is not at all unlikely that some one among those who are in pursuit of us, recognised our persons."

"Stuff, now is that here at all likely?"

"Too likely, I'm afraid."

"That's because ye're a fool, an' allus a frightnin' yerself vithout not no reason. Even if any on 'em should a knowed us, an' had been near enuff to us, it'd been keville impossible for 'em to hav' diskiver'd us in this here disguise. Kim along, I say, ve only loses time."

"Whither do you intend to go?"

"I've told yer, to our pals on the other side of the heath, to be sure, where ve shall be safe."

"Cannot we avoid the heath?" said Beaufort, with a shudder.

"Not dissackly," replied Sam, "an' vot of that? Vot have ve got to be frightened about there?"

"Filcher returned Beaufort, in a tremulous voice, and with a look of terror, "need you ask that question, and recal to your memory the terrible work of your hands?"

"Come, that's enuff of that here," answered Sam, exhibiting some uneasiness; "so the less yer say the better. That's all gone an' past now, an' had better be forgotten."

"Forgotten!" repeated the wretched Beaufort; "oh, it is impossible to forget that atrocious deed of blood, or the last words of your murdered victim, and which have already been so awfully fulfilled."

"Cease, coward!" commanded Filcher, fiercely, the expression of his features at the same time showing that, in spite of his efforts to conceal it, he could not altogether stifle the voice of a guilty conscience; "if yer persist in talking in that here way, yer an' I shall have a serious fall out, that here's all about it. I've got summatt else to do, an' summatt else to think on, than in listening to yer foolish fears. All's clear afore us, so let's make the best of our way, and thank our lucky stars as it's not no worse."

Beaufort saw that all he could say to the ruffian could have no other effect than, as usual, to excite, either his ridicule or rage, he therefore ceased, and with thoughts of that torturing description which it is unnecessary to describe, followed Filcher in sullen silence, frequently, however, looking anxiously back, fearful that they might still be pursued.

The reflection of the terrible conflagration was still visible in the distance, and it was quite evident that the progress of the flames could not be checked or subdued till the entire destruction of the farm had been effected, and the ruin of the unfortunate Henry Ashford and his sister, if even they escaped with their lives, accomplished.

These thoughts tortured the mind of Beaufort as he and the villain Filcher proceeded on their precipitate retreat from the fearful scene of destruction, and sincere were the feelings of regret and remorse which stung his guilty conscience, and which he had already so often expressed to his hardened companion.

As they approached nearer towards the heath, the scene of the former hideous crime, his fears increased, and he was totally unable to conceal them from the observation of Sam Filcher, upon whom, however, they had no other effect than to excite his derision, and to cause him to look upon Beaufort with the most supreme contempt, whilst he, as was his wont, the reader is aware, on similar occasions, endeavoured to amuse himself, and to show his utmost indifference, and the total absence of all fear and remorse of conscience, by alternately singing and whistling.

It seemed indeed as if they had now entirely eluded the vigilance of their pursuers, and that, at any rate, they were secure from all detection for the present, for the lateness of the hour prevented any one from being about, and they did not encounter a human being in the dreary and unfrequented way they were travelling. Besides what could possibly excite suspicion against them, as there had been no one near the spot to observe them at the time of the atrocious act of incendiarism?

These thoughts even somewhat re-assured Beaufort, and he endeavoured to dismiss the fears that had haunted him, but that was a task much more easily attempted than accomplished.

"Vell," said Filcher, at last, "we've got far out of the reach of danger now, thanks to my sagacity, an' the speed of our legs, an' ve can ventur' to walk a little more at our ease; though the sooner ve reach the crib the better. There, don't look so down upon luck, captain. See vot a first rate night's vork ve've made of it."

And the heartless miscreant chuckled again with satisfaction.

"What," returned Beaufort, with a look of horror and disgust, "by effecting the utter ruin of the unfortunate Henry Ashford?"

"As for that here," said Sam, "so long as we gain vhy should we study other people?" We must live, yer know, no matter who suffers."

"Villain!" said Beaufort.

"I knows it," retorted Filcher, with a frightful grin, as though he gloried in the frightful name; "ain't there a pair of us? But I ag'in cautions yer, captain, ag'in makin' too free with my name in that here way. The less yer indulges in sich complements the better. Howsomdever, our hex-chicker is ag'in 'plenish'd, an' I dare say that here'll console yer for everything, when yer comes to have a glass or two of grog into yer, an' to reflect seriously on the business. I don't care now soon we arrives at the end of our journey though. An' see yonder's the old heath."

Beaufort eagerly strained his eyes in the direction to which Filcher pointed, and at sight of the heath at no great distance, and upon which they must shortly enter, all the horrors of the night of the murder rushed with overwhelming force upon his memory, and he trembled, unable to conceal the violent fears that agitated him from the keen observation of Filcher, whose ever repulsive features were still more distorted by a frightful grin, which showed that he viewed the remorseful sufferings of his guilty companion with fiend like feelings of satisfaction.

"Cannot we avoid the heath, Filcher?" he anxiously interrogated.

"No," replied Sam, "vot's the use of axin' me that here keveshtun? Yer know we can't."

"At any rate," said Beaufort, in a faltering voice, "we can avoid that fearful spot where—"

"That here preshus old 'oman died, I suppose yer means to say," rejoined Filcher; "vhy d'yer hesitate? vhy doesn't yer out vith it at vonce? No, we can't very well do that here nayther, cos it's the nearest cut by a mile, and that here's an hobject jist now."

"And dare you venture near the scene of your frightful crime?"

"Yes; not as a matter of taste disackly, but conwen'ence."

"Will no feeling of remorse ever touch your hardened conscience?"

"I don't know. Howsomdever, I've summat else to think about now, so don't trouble me vith any more sich foolish obserwashuns."

Beaufort looked at him with an expression of the most unmitigated disgust and abhorrence, but said no more, and Sam, renewing his singing, proceeded on the way, the former

following slowly and reluctantly behind, and looking towards the dreary heath which they were now rapidly approaching, with feelings of the utmost dread.

They at length entered upon the heath, upon which the moon—which was every now and then obscured by dark clouds—shed a pale and ghastly light, which only gave it a still more gloomy and even fearful aspect.

Sam Filcher, as though to exult in the terrors of his wretched companion, and, if possible, to add to them, took the direct way towards the spot where the murder was committed, and on which a stone had since been placed recording the dreadful deed, ever and anon looking back, and beckoning Beaufort peremptorily to follow.

But at length the latter suddenly stopped, overcome by his terrors, and refused to proceed farther.

"Now then, vot's up?" demanded Sam, in angry accents. "D'yer think I'm alwas a going to submit to yer nonsense, an' all yer cowardly fancies? Yer von't go no further, von't yer? Vell, we shall see about that here. Yer'd better not force me to use more powerful argyments to persuade yer."

"Sam," returned Beaufort, "you ever seem to take delight to torture and annoy me. Why should I yield to your villanous caprices? I will not."

"But yer must," said Filcher, sternly and resolutely, "yer can't help yerself, an' yer must be a fool to run yer head ag'in a brick vall, I fancy yer'd soon find out vich vos the softest. Kim along, and don't be vastin' the time stopping here, vich we might spend in enjoyment vith our pals."

"I dare not again approach that fearful spot," said Beaufort with a shudder of uncontrollable horror, "there is no necessity, I am convinced, to go near it, and why do you obstinately persist in doing so?"

"Becos 'tis my whim," answered the ruffian, "besides I tell yer we shall save a mile of ground by it. Yer know my temper, at least arter all these years yer ought to know it, when I've made up my mind, so yer might as vell make no more fuss about it."

"What a degraded wretch I am," said Beaufort, "to suffer myself thus to be made the tool, the mere sport of a reckless villain. Beware, Filcher, the time may yet come when you will have bitter cause to repent such conduct as this."

"Ah," exclaimed Filcher, with a savage look, "dare yer threaten? dare yer deny the power I hold over yer? Recollect vot I have often promised yer if yer rode rusty, an' only mind as how yer don't compel me to keep my vord. Lets away vithout any more bother; d'yer think as how I vants to stay here all night?"

He grasped the wrist of Beaufort, who seemed to be almost powerless as an infant in his hands, as he spoke, and hurried him away towards that fatal spot which he so much dreaded to traverse again.

The moon still shed a pale and sickly light on all around, and all was silent as the dead, save when the wind swept in mournful gusts across the dreary heath, and frequently made the wretched Beaufort start and look terribly around him, as he could almost fancy he heard hollow and sepulchral voices murmuring in his ears, and cursing and mocking him.

He had seldom, if ever, felt a greater sensation of dread at his heart, and he would have given the world to have been permitted to retrace his step, and even to brave every danger which might threaten him by so doing than to proceed. But Sam Filcher, with menacing looks, still forced him along, and he had little or no power to oppose him.

And at length they stood within a few paces of the spot where the unfortunate old woman had received her frightful death at the hands of the inhuman scoundrel Filcher, who endeavoured again to urge Beaufort forward, but worked up to a pitch of the most indescribable terror, he now successfully resisted him, and forcing himself from his hold, and covering his face with his hands, as if to shut out the sight of any ghastly object which might appear before him, he rushed hurriedly forward, scarcely knowing whither he went or what he was doing, his hardened associate in crime appearing to take very little heed of him, and not trying to detain him.

Sam Filcher walked deliberately and resolutely up to the stone, and read the inscription—which stated the particulars of the circumstances under which the body of the murdered woman had been found, together with the date—then with a half stifled laugh he turned away, and hastened after the unhappy and terrified Beaufort, commanding him in a stern and peremptory voice to stop, which, however, was not regarded by him. But Filcher quickly overtook him, and again grasping him by the wrist, said—

"Damn yer, where air yer hurrying to? Did yer think to give me the go by, eh?"

Beaufort looked timidly and half imploringly in the villain's face, but was unable to return any answer.

"Yer see," remarked Filcher, in a tone of levity which excited still greater disgust than ever in the mind of Beaufort, "I've not been carried away by any hobbergoberlin, about which yer vos so much afeared. They've stated the old 'omans death in pretty strong langidge though, an' not no mistake. Vell, they're welcome to do so, they'll be puzzled to diskiver who did it, I reckon."

"Let us begone," said Beaufort in a faint and tremulous voice, "there is an air of horror breathes around this place which I cannot endure."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Filcher, contemptuously, "vell, yer air a preshus 'pology for a man, an' not no mistake. Bliest if yer vos only jist to see yer own shadder on the ground, yer'd be afeared and try to run away from it. Bah, when vill yer learn to muster up a little pluck? I'm ashamed on yer."

"You are, I repeat, a hardened scoundrel," retorted Beaufort.

"Thank yer for the compliment, it vill be the 'onest pride of Sam Filcher, the Sprig of Myrtle allus to deserve that here wery 'onnerbel kracter."

"The time will come when remorse will touch even your flinty heart, and you will tremble with horror at the near approach of that ignominious fate which sooner or later inevitably awaits you."

"Indeed, how long is it since you've turned prophet?"

"At any rate my predictions are sure to be fulfilled; such matchless villany as your's—such hideous crimes as those of which you have been guilty, depend upon it, will not remain for ever unpunished."

"And as ye're perfectly hinnocent, yer'll 'scape scot free, I s'pose?"

"No," answered Beaufort, with a look of the greatest agony; I am a villain, a most consummate villain, and I know the certain doom that awaits me. Would that I could recal the past, oh, that I had never met with you."

"You do?" said Sam, with an affected look of surprise and reproach, "vell, I never—if that here ain't hingraterhood, I don't know vot is. Vot would yer have done vithout me? I've been a bennyfactor to yer, a perfect father, an' this is the return yer makes for it. Oh, shocking, yer hurts my feelings."

And the sensitive Sam Filcher shook his head mournfully and reproachfully, and pretended to be deeply affected.

"But never mind," he continued after a pause, and in a self consolatory tone, "it's the vay of the world, and I s'pose I must put up vith it. I forgive's yer, so ve'll say no more about it, but make the best of our vay to the place ve're a going to. I s'pose yer have no hobbeckshun to that here?"

Beaufort certainly had not any objection but on the contrary, was most anxious to quit the place which excited so many feelings of horror in his breast, and therefore, after casting one more timid glance towards the stone which marked the spot of the murder, he followed Sam Filcher hastily across the heath.

CHAPTER CXXXV.

THE SCENE OF THE CONFLAGRATION.

Leaving for a time the reckless and desperate Sam Filcher, and his wretched guilty companion Beaufort, we will return to the fearful scene of the conflagration, and the terrible situation of the unfortunate inmates of the farm.

It has been stated that on the fatal evening alluded to, Phoebe and her friends had retired to their chambers at an earlier hour than usual, labouring under a depression of spirits and a dismal foreboding of some approaching calamity for which they could not readily account.

These painful and melancholy feelings continued to disturb the minds of our heroine and Amy Ashford for some time after they had entered their room for the night, and notwithstanding all their efforts to do so, they found it impossible to dismiss them, and for a short time they were too occupied with them to retire to rest.

"What can be the cause of these terrible thoughts," observed Phoebe, "the strange and irresistible fears and misgivings that distract my brain, and of which yourself, Amy, and your brother, as you have acknowledged, so strongly partake? In vain I try to banish the idea from my mind that something dreadful is about to happen to us which will cause us greater misery, if possible, than any misfortune which has hitherto occurred to us."

"It is a terrible thought," returned Amy, with a shudder, "and I know not why it should enter our minds, and yet I own, that I cannot dismiss the feeling from my breast. But the day has been gloomy and cheerless, and that may be one of the principal causes of it."

Our heroine shook her head doubtingly, and her looks sufficiently showed the powerful impression that was made upon her mind, and which she was quite unable for the present, at any rate, to remove.

"Let us kneel down, Amy," she said, "and implore the Almighty in His infinite mercy to avert the calamity we so strangely apprehend."

They did so, after which their minds felt a little more composed, and they at length retired to bed and endeavoured in sleep to banish all dismal thoughts.

In the meantime Henry Ashford on separating from his sister and Phoebe, and entering his own chamber—which, as has been shown, was at the back of the premises, —threw himself into a chair, and abandoned himself to the same melancholy and unaccountable thoughts that disturbed their minds

and it was some time since he had felt so truly wretched before, and the more he endeavoured to conquer the feeling, the worse, if possible, he became.

It seemed to his disordered imagination, that he was standing on the brink of ruin, from which no effort could save him; that all his hopes and prospects in life were about to be crushed, destroyed; and yet he could assign no cause for such a torturing thought entering his mind, for latterly he had been most prosperous, a prosperity which he had every reason to hope would continue.

"It is strange, it is most extraordinary," he soliloquised, as he arose from his chair, and traversed the room with disordered steps, "why should I suffer such apparently groundless fears to disturb me, and at the very time, too, when my prospects seem to wear a more cheerful aspect than they have hitherto done? It is a sickly feeling, a weakness which I must and will endeavour to conquer."

This, however, he found to be a much more difficult task than he had imagined it would, and for some time longer he continued to abandon himself to the same gloomy thoughts, and which on retiring to bed pursued him in his dreams.

It was being in this anxious and bewildered state of mind which caused him to neglect seeing to the proper security of the doors for the night; his faithful dog Nero, had also died a day or two before, so that the villains Filcher and Beaufort could not have ventured upon the burglary at a more opportune time.

Henry Ashford suddenly started in a state of great excitement from a fearful dream which had occurred to his imagination, and on somewhat recovering himself, he was surprised and alarmed at finding the room-door standing wide open, knowing that he had locked it previous to retiring to bed, and in at which the next moment a dense cloud of smoke entered, which was nearly suffocating, a crackling sound met his ears, and immediately after was followed by a broad and vivid glare of light, which too fearfully convinced him of the awful catastrophe that had taken place.

With a cry of agony, the unfortunate young man hastily leaped out of bed, and slipping on his small clothes, he rushed to the window, where he beheld the stack of hay blazing fiercely, fanned by the wind, and the flames from which, to his horror, he had no doubt, had already gained sufficient hold on the premises to threaten their rapid and total destruction.

The horrible state of Henry Ashford's mind at that moment may be imagined, and for a few seconds he was so confused that he scarcely knew what to do.

But Phoebe and his sister were the first that entered his thoughts, and with an exclamation of horror and agony, which it would be difficult to describe, he rushed from the room through the suffocating smoke and with difficulty gained the foot of the staircase which led to their chamber, calling wildly upon their names.

By this time the flames had got a strong hold of the premises, with most astonishing rapidity, and the inhabitants of the neighbourhood were rushing to the spot from every direction in a state of the greatest consternation, and it was then that Filcher and Beaufort were seen precipitately retreating from the spot, at a short distance, and suspicion being immediately excited, a pursuit was commenced by three or four of the rustics, while the rest hastened to the scene of destruction, in the hope of being able to render some effectual assistance.

But how terrible was the situation of our heroine and Amy. The noise and confusion which prevailed, and the thick clouds of smoke that filled their chamber had awakened them, and their unspeakable horror, when they perceived what had happened, which they did immediately, may easily be imagined.

They uttered loud screams of terror, and sprang quickly from the bed and tried to grope their way to the door, which, however, in the confusion and the smoke they could not find, and they staggered back in complete despair and almost suffocated.

By this time the flames had gained a fearful ascendancy, and completely enveloped every part of the building.

Phoebe and her companion threw themselves into each other's arms, and gave themselves up for lost, for to escape from the burning building seemed to be impossible. But even in that moment of horror they thought as anxiously of Henry Ashford as themselves.

They next rushed to one of the windows, which they threw up, calling frantically for help, and they could then perceive the frightful extent of all the horrors by which they were surrounded, and the awful work of destruction which the devouring element was so rapidly performing.

At that critical moment it was that Henry ascended the staircase leading to their chamber, resolved to save those who were far more precious to him than his own existence, or perish in the attempt.

They heard his voice, calling frantically on their names as he approached, and they tried to answer him, but the dense smoke which filled the room prevented them, and then they endeavoured again to find the door, which they reached just he burst it open, and they rushed wildly into his arms, poor

Phoebe, overpowered by her emotions, immediately fainting.

"Dear Henry," said his sister, "there is not an instant to be lost, the fierce flames spread with frightful rapidity, and escape will soon be impossible. For heaven's sake see to the rescue of poor Phoebe, and heed me not; I shall, with the assistance of providence, be able to follow you, I trust, in safety.

"Quick then, noble-minded girl," hastily ejaculated Henry; "keep close to me and we will either, with the blessing of heaven, all be saved, or perish together."

As he spoke, he raised the inanimate form of Phoebe in his arms, and dashed down the staircase—which the flames had nearly reached—thinking that his sister was following him.

The smoke was so dense that it was utterly impossible for him to perceive whither he was going, at the same time it was almost overpowering, combined with the tremendous heat of the flames which were now at their full height.

The manner in which he was enabled to brave and surmount every danger was truly miraculous, but fortunately he contrived to reach one of the open doors below, and still supporting the form of our insensible heroine in his arms, but nearly exhausted, he rushed from the burning building, amid the shouts and acclamations of the assembled multitude.

Having resigned Phoebe to the care of two of the bystanders, he looked anxiously around for his sister, fully expecting that she had followed him closely down the staircase, but not seeing her, the horror and anguish of his feelings may be imagined.

"My sister, my unfortunate sister," he frantically exclaimed, "oh, why do you thus stand inactive by? Good God, must she be allowed to perish! No, dear Amy, there is no risk which I will not run to save you, however fearful."

In spite of the persons around endeavouring to prevent him—the farm servants at that time being in the building for the purpose of rescuing their master, and the females, if possible—Henry was about to rush into the doomed house, amidst the fire and smoke, when a loud shout from the spectators arrested his footsteps, and the next moment Amy, quite insensible, was borne by one of the labouring men in safety into the open air.

The scene of excitement which now prevailed baffles description. The fire was raging still more fiercely than ever, the flames extending to every part of the premises, rendering all attempts to extinguish them perfectly useless, and the total destruction of the building was certain.

Phoebe and Amy were conveyed to the nearest cottage without delay, the distracted Henry Ashford following to see that they were properly attended to, but he quickly returned to the awful scene of destruction, which he contemplated with feelings of the most intense agony and despair, for he there beheld his utter ruin, the destruction of those hopes and prospects which by his own indefatigable industry and perseverance had been created.

To attempt to save any part of the building, now appeared to be almost hopeless, so frightful was the hold which the flames had obtained, and such was also the combustible nature of the materials of which the premises had been constructed.

It was now for the first time that it was intimated to Henry Ashford, that there could be very little doubt that the fire was the atrocious work of a couple of incendiaries, who had been seen retreating precipitately from the spot, and of whom several persons had gone in pursuit, and he found it impossible to control the anguish of his feelings on this discovery.

"Oh, God!" he groaned, striking his forehead in despair; "what injury have I ever done to any human being, that I should thus be made the victim of so monstrous an act of vengeance? What wretches can have been guilty of so fiendish a deed?"

His feelings were excited to a most insupportable degree, and there was not a person present who did not most warmly sympathise with him.

Mr. Stubbles and his servants were among the first at the fearful scene, and need it be stated that they were foremost in rendering all the assistance in their power? The worthy squire at the same time exerting himself to the utmost to soothe the agony of Henry's feelings, under so terrible a calamity, but, as might be expected, with only indifferent success.

After much persuasion, he prevailed upon him to leave the awful scene, and accompany him to his residence, whither our heroine and Amy—in a state of mind it would be impossible for any language properly to portray—were also conveyed, and every attention paid to their necessities on the frightful occasion, that humanity could suggest.

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

SAM FILCHER AND BEAUFORT ENJOY
THEMSELVES.

The work of destruction continued with frightful rapidity, and notwithstanding all the exertions that were used in so praise-

worthy a manner, to endeavour to save at least a portion of the premises, and some of the most valuable of the unfortunate Henry Ashford's property, nearly everything fell a sacrifice to the devouring element, thus "at one fell sweep" rendering him houseless and almost a beggar.

It was a terrible blow, from which it seemed almost impossible for him to recover, and it need not be wondered that his fortitude entirely forsook him under it.

Those who had gone in pursuit of the supposed incendiaries, had returned, and reported the ill-success of their endeavours, and as there was no one among them even when they were nearest to the villains who could recognise their persons, there did not appear to be the least probability of their ever being detected and brought to justice.

By the following morning—for the fire continued more or less during the night—there was nothing left of the once prosperous farm, and happy home of Henry Ashford, but a heap of smoking and smouldering ruins, and people came from all the surrounding districts, to gaze with feelings of the deepest regret upon the melancholy scene, for it is almost unnecessary to say that Henry Ashford was held in the highest esteem by all who knew him for his numerous manly qualities and the general urbanity of his disposition.

It was generally believed that it was not only a diabolical feeling of revenge which had prompted to the deed, but that a burglary had either been effected or attempted, and that opinion was corroborated by the fact of Henry finding his chamber-door standing wide open, and, moreover, on searching the ruins a day or two after the fire, a bunch of skeleton keys was found, and which Sam Filcher no doubt had dropped in his hurry on leaving the premises.

If a robbery had indeed been committed—which there seemed to be no doubt that there had been—Henry had every reason to believe that the robber or robbers had taken care to possess themselves of the money contained in the desk, but, as unfortunately the numbers of the notes were unknown, there was little or no chance of their being detected by that means.

Again we will pursue the footsteps of the villain's Sam Filcher and Beaufort, whom we left making their way with all the speed they could across the dreary heath, towards the lonely house on its borders, which was the haunt of so many of the lawless wretches with whom they were associated, and with whom they had been residing occasionally for the last three months.

Beaufort's fears partially vanished, the further they got from the scene of the dreadful murder of the old gipsy sybil, but still he



could not help reflecting with feelings of regret and horror upon the fearful events of the night, and the terrible work of destruction which had been effected by the desperate hand of the miscreant Filcher, and by which the lives of Henry Ashford, his sister, and Phoebe had probably been sacrificed, so quickly had the flames spread before any assistance could arrive. It was an act of wanton cruelty for which not even the slightest excuse could be offered, and the more he reflected on it, the greater became his disgust and abhorrence.

He now bitterly reproached himself for the ready assent he had given to the burglary, and which had led to such terrible and unforeseen results, and he could not but consider himself all but equally guilty with his infamous associate.

Sam every now and then fixed a keen and penetrating glance upon his countenance, and seemed to read the thoughts that were passing in his mind, but if so, they only excited his contempt and derision.

As for himself, Sam Filcher appeared to be perfectly comfortable, and to give no thought to the startling occurrences of the evening, in which he had taken so prominent and guilty a part. He whistled and sung alternately, according to custom, occasionally however, giving utterance to an oath, drawn forth by the length and tediousness of the journey across the heath, and his impatience and anxiety for refreshment, of which no doubt an ample supply could be obtained on their arriving at the place of their destination.

"Vot a pity it is," he remarked, "that no von ever had the spirit to 'stablish a half-vay

house on this here preshus heath; vot vith veary and benighted vealthy travellers, an all sich like customers, I should think it might be made to answer very vell. In course it would not do to be very particular to a shado or two. Ve shall never reach the old crib I think, an' I feel as thirsty as a fish, an' as hungry as a wolf. How d'yer feel now, captain? Pretty chuff-like, eh? Arter a storm comes a calm, so, I s'pose yer feels all right now. There's no ghostes or hobbergoberlins here to frighten yer."

Beaufort viewed the ruffian with a look of disgust, but he did not condescend to return him any answer, and Sam remained silent for a minute or two.

"Ve've not yet had the time or hopportunity to count this here ochre," he said at length, "but there seems to be a pretty good svag, an' ye ought to thank our lucky stars for it, and that it has been got with sich a very little trouble."

"It was probably the whole fortune of Henry Ashford," returned Beaufort, "all that he has been enabled to accumulate by industry and the most rigid economy, and—"

"And so," added Filcher, with a sneer, "yer would have me return it to him in a parcel, with my name an' address, thanking him very perlutely for a sight of it. But if I do, I'm damned; Sam Filcher knows his bus'ness better than that. He's not so green. A bird in the hand's worth two in the bush."

Beaufort looked at him with increased dis gust as he replied.

"The deed you have this night perpetrated is one of almost unexampled cruelty, and it makes me shudder when I think of it. Henry Ashford by the total destruction of his property, is no doubt ruined, and—"

"And why should that here trouble yer?" demanded Filcher, abruptly, "if he's lost all his rowdy, it's got into the hands of those who knows how to make use on it, an' he's young enuff to work for more, it'll keep him employed and amused."

"Brute!" exclaimed Beaufort, unable to restrain the expression of his feelings.

"Brute in yer teeth," cried the miscreant, passionately, and clenching his fists, "I tells yer vot it is, captain, vonce for all, yer can't afford to hindulge in sich langidge as that here, when ye're talking to a gemman like me, an' if I hears another vord like that escape yer, I'll show yer vot sort of stuff old Sam Filcher is still made of. Yer hears vot I say, an' yer'd better mind it too, or yer may have cause to repent it."

Beaufort mustered sufficient courage to fix upon him a look of contempt and defiance, but he returned no answer to his threatening observations, and they proceeded some distance further in silence.

The gloom and horror of the scene was now increased, for the moon was entirely hidden behind black and ponderous clouds, a piercing wind swept at intervals in their faces, and a drizzling rain fell, which was anything but pleasant, and drew many oaths and curses from Sam Filcher, Beaufort, however, being too busily engaged with his own gloomy thoughts to take much heed of the weather.

In this manner they continued to walk for about a quarter of an hour longer, when Sam Filcher suddenly exclaimed in a tone of satisfaction—

"All right at last, ve shall be there in a jiffy, there's the lights from the old crib, an' I can almost fancy that I smells the grub an' the lish; I'll play my part with them here, I'll varrant."

Beaufort looked eagerly in the direction whither Sam Filcher pointed, and was himself gratified by beholding the lights proceeding from the windows of the old house, for he was tired of his journey, and the exciting events of the night, and like Sam needed some rest and refreshment.

"Hark yer, captain," said Sam suddenly pausing, and laying his hand on Beaufort's arm, "as regards vot has happened this here night, and the blunt ve've got in our pursession, yer'd better be cautious afore our pals, and foller me in everything, d'yer hear? It von't do to let 'em know too much. As for the blaze, yer'd better not say nuffin about it, or p'raps I—but yer understands me, I dare say."

Beaufort did understand him, but contented himself by nodding assent.

"It vill be as vell to keep 'em dark about the fire," remarked Sam, "an' there's no 'casion for em to know as ve've had anything to do with it."

"Such an act of unparalleled villany, is sure to cause the greatest sensation," said Beaufort; "it will soon reach their ears, and their suspicions are almost sure to light upon us. It will not be safe for us to remain much longer among them."

"Psha!" returned Filcher, impatiently, "yere alwus alarmin' yerself without any reason. D'yer think old pals would ever betray us, if even as how they knowed all ve'd been hup to? Not they. But here ve air, an' they're at it ag'in as usual, singing, as merry as sand boys, it does a feller's heart good to hear 'em."

They had now got near the old house, and the boisterous mirth of the lawless inmates saluted their ears, and re-echoed far around while the light from a blazing fire in one of the lower rooms, shed a cheerful reflection upon the dreary spot on which Filcher and Beaufort stood, and had a curious effect upon the objects around.

It was strange that such a daring resort for the most desperate and villanous characters should never been interfered with by the officers of justice, or was allowed to exist at all, particularly as highway robberies and murders of the most brutal description were of constant occurrence in that part of the country, but more disgrace to the proper authorities, such was the notorious fact, and the lawless ruffians there found a safe asylum and carried on their nefarious and diabolical transactions with impunity, setting the law at defiance, and probably with the knowledge and under the very sanction of its officers themselves.

Certainly the building could not be better situated for its guilty purposes, and few persons who had any regard for their lives or the property they might have about them, would have the hardihood—suspecting its real character—to venture to approach it after nightfall, or even in the broad light of day.

Sam Filcher and Beaufort advanced close the gloomy old building, which in some parts had fallen into decay, and the former gave a loud and peculiar knock at the door, which resounded hollowly through the old place, and after a brief pause, a window was thrown open over the door-way, which was covered with ivy, and a man's head was thrust out, who demanded in a gruff voice, who was there:—

“All right, Jack,” replied Filcher.

“All right, Sam,” repeated the man, and he immediately quitted the window and shortly after make his appearance at the door, and admitted Filcher and Beaufort into the *sanctum sanctorum*.

Traversing the hall, Jack—as Filcher had familiarly called him—opened a door on the right, and ushered them into the room in which an assemblage of some of the most desperate scoundrels who had not yet come under the operations of the hangman, were seated together, regaling and enjoying themselves after their own fashion, namely, by drinking, smoking, singing, swearing, laughing, and ribald jests.

They greeted Sam and his companion in the most cordial manner, and the latter felt his spirits greatly and immediately revive, on finding himself once more safely housed, after the startling events of the evening, and the narrow escape which he and Filcher had had from apprehension.

They were quickly seated in the midst of the ruffians, and partaking heartily of that refreshment, of which there was a superabundance, and of which they both really stood so much in need.

The apartment in which this strange and uncouth meeting was gathered, was very spacious and, of the most ancient description,

with oak panels, and curious carved work. A long oak table was fixed in the centre of it, round which were placed forms, for the accommodation of the worthy gentlemen who honoured it with their presence, and to do justice to the plenteous fare with which it was loaded.

An immense fire was blazing in the old fashioned grate, which cast a red glare upon the room, and the ferocious looking features of the ruffians. Fire arms and cutlasses were handy for immediate use, in case they should be required.

There were traps in the flooring of this apartment, and secret doors in the oak wainscot, by which instant escape could be made in cases of emergency, and in fact, nothing could possibly be better constructed than the place altogether, for the lawless purposes to which it was put.

“Vell here ve air, yer see, my flowers, all alive an’ kicking, as ve ses in the clarsicks,” remarked Sam Filcher in his most friendly and agreeable manner, when himself and Beaufort had snugly ensconced themselves near the fire; “I dare say now, yer began to feel rayther anxious an’ uneasy for our return.”

“Why,” returned one of the fellows, whose cheeks glowed almost as red as the fire from the effects of the deep libations he had been so freely indulging in, and who was blowing an extra stiff cloud from a short, black pipe, “you are rather late. Has there been anything particular up? Any extraordinary luck, eh?”

“No, no,” replied Sam, with a melancholy shake of the head, “kevite diffrent, ain’t it, captain? Wery bad luck to night, wery, in short no luck at all. Ve vos disappointed in the spec ve vent upon.”

“Indeed?” said the man, sneeringly, and with a look of suspicion, from which Beaufort in particular shrunk.

“Ah!” said Sam, in a tone of melancholy regret, “bs’ness is wery bad now, wery—I don’t know vot’ll become on us all if the times doesn’t mend. Never mind, yer’ve got plenty of the right sort of stuff on board, so me an’ my friend the captain, vill hendever to console ourselves in the midst of our misfortins, and to be ‘appy an’ comfortable. Here’s jolly good luck, my buttercups.”

And with this Mr. Sam Filcher, without any further ceremony, laid hold of a pewter measure containing about two thirds of a pint of rum, which he swallowed off at a draught, and smacked his lips after it, as though he approved of and relished it.

Beaufort also, was by no means backward in helping himself to a refreshing draught, which put fresh life into him, and for the time banished the gloomy thoughts which had before racked his brain.

"Ah!" remarked Sam, again smacking his lips, "that here's summat like, an' does a feller's heart good, arter coming out of the cold, an its none too varm a coming across that preshus heath to night, I can tell yer."

"Somebody's felt it rather too warm to-night, I take it," said one of the ruffians, who gloried in the name of Dick Nibbles; "there's been a rare blaze on the other side of the heath. Didn't you observe anything of it, Sam?"

"Why," answered Sam, hesitating, and not half liking the question; "I think I did notice summat of the sort."

Beaufort trembled, and averted his looks from the rather too close scrutiny of Dick Nibbles.

"Notice it," repeated the latter, in answer to Sam Filcher, "you must have been blind if you didn't. Why, we all saw the reflection here."

"Some haccident, I dare say," observed Sam, carelessly, though he really felt rather confused and uneasy; "ah, vell, it can't be helped, an' it don't so much matter, as ve vosen't burnt out. But come, its no use a vastin' time now ve're on to it. So push about the grog, ve'll have a comfortabel night on it."

"Sam seems to be in unkimmin good spirits to night," said another of the men who had not before spoken; "considering he's been out of luck."

"To be sure he is," returned Filcher, "he alwus is, vot's the use of being down upon yer luck, I should like to know? Yer vos all merry enuff vhen I an' the captain come vithin sight of the crib, an' that's vot I likes. S'pose I giv's yer a bit of a stave?"

This proposition—the vocal abilities of Mr. Sam Filcher being greatly admired—was received with the strongest and most unanimous marks of approbation, and Sam having cleared his throat with another copious draught, commenced operations in a most vigorous and determined style, delighting his audience with one of his favourite and pathetic flash ditties, which together with the chorus, occupied a period of not less than half an hour in the execution, and at its conclusion was most boisterously and enthusiastically applauded.

There was then a song from everyone round, even Beaufort included, who by this time being pretty well primed with the intoxicating drink which was lavishly supplied him, was deaf to the voice of conscience, and entered into the mirth of his ruffianly companions with infinite gusto.

It having again come to Sam's turn to "do the vocal," with his usual good humour and anxiety to make himself agreeable, he once more delighted his companions with a cha-

racteristic ballad of about the same length as the first, and which receiving a most vociferous and unanimous encore, he immediately complied, and accomplished his task with so much ability and complete success, that he carried off, by general assent, and in the critical judgment of every one present, the laurels of the evening.

And thus they continued their harmony with unabated spirit for more than a couple of hours, when being fairly exhausted, what with their exertions, and the liberal quantity of drink they had taken, they were compelled as Sam Filcher elegantly expressed it, to "call a go," and separated for the night, Sam and Beaufort retiring to the chamber which was allotted to them.

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

THIEF ROB THIEF.

Sam Filcher, however, notwithstanding the effects of the drink he had so freely indulged in, did not feel inclined to retire to bed immediately, anxious as he was to have some further conversation with Beaufort on the events of the night, although the latter evinced evident signs of drowsiness, and did not feel much disposed to listen to him.

"That here Dick Nibbles is rayther too quisitive," observed Sam; "I didn't halflike vot he said. He seemed to doubt my vord, vhen I said ve'd been out of luck to-night."

"It's not quite so easy to deceive these fellows as you seem to think," returned Beaufort, "you ought to have known that before this time, they look upon us with doubt, the fire has excited their suspicions, and should they discovers that you have told them falsely, and that it was the work of your hands, a feeling of revenge might tempt them to betray all, and—"

"There now," interrupted Sam, "don't yer begin to alarm yerself for not no reason votsomdever. There's not no fear of 'em a bowling us out, if ve only keeps our own counsel. I tells yer ag'in ve're as safe as the bank from diskivery, so ye may as vell make yerself easy upon that here pint. Ve must have been flats indeed to have told 'em all about it, and shared the blunt vith 'em."

"That ill-gotten money," said Beaufort, with a look of disgust and regret, "the loss of which, together with the fearful destruction of his property, must entail inevitable ruin upon a worthy young man, and call down the most terrible retribution of heaven upon the authors of it."

"Let's have no more of that here preaching, if yer please," replied Sam, impatiently, and with a frown, "for it don't agree with

my constitooshun. The best thing ve can do, now ve're alone, an' ve've the hopper-tunity, is to hexamine the walle of the svag, and then ve shall be in a better condishun to chalk out our plans for the future. Here ve are," added the villain, taking from his pocket the parcel of notes and the bag of cash, of which he had plundered the desk of the unfortunate Henry Ashford, and placing them on the table.

"Ve'll commence with this here little lot first," he said, untying the parcel of notes, and proceeded to count them.

"Von, two—three, four, five, and five's ten," he said, "good luck, ten ten's to commence vith; that here's jist a cool hunder'd, according to kocker, at least, so I vos teach'd at collich. Two, an' two's four—an' four's eight, an' two's ten five's; that here's fifty. Von hunder'd an' fifty poun's in notes. That here's not so much amiss, an' ought to make yer look up a bit, captain. Now for the loose cash."

He emptied the contents of the bag upon the table, and was about to count it, when Beaufort grasped his arm with a look of alarm.

"Vot's the matter now?" demanded Sam Filcher, angrily, and looking up from the glittering heap.

"Did you not hear?"

"Vot?"

"There was a noise at the room door."

"All fancy," returned Sam; "vhy every-thing's as still as the grave in the house, our pals are snoozing fast enuff by this time, an' ve're no cause to fear being disturbed."

"I'm certain that I was not mistaken," said Beaufort, positively, and with an increased look of alarm, "I distinctly heard the whispering of voices and the shuffling of feet outside the door."

"Psha," ejaculated Sam Filcher, "ye're alwus a getting some stupied noshuns into that here preshus head of yourn. Howsom-dever, ve'll soon be satisfied upon that here p'int."

He took up the lamp as he thus spoke, and going to the room-door and opening it, he looked out, then closed it again, and returned surlily to the table.

"Vot a damned fanciful fool yer air," he said; "there's not no von there. Now don't yer hinterrupt me an' put me out of my reckoning ag'in."

Thus saying, he re-seated himself at the table, and again proceeded to count the money which the bag had contained, Beaufort, however, still trembling, and keeping his eyes fixed with suspicion upon the door.

Sam Filcher proceeded with his agreeable task, evidently much to his own satisfaction.

"Good ag'in," he exclaimed with a look of exultation, "if this here ain't a good night's

work, I doesn't know vot is. Vhy, there's jist upon another hunder'd here, in silver an' gould. Vot a foolish young man Henry Ashford must be to keep so much blunt in his house. Vell its a ill vind as blows nobody not no good."

An exclamation of terror from Beaufort, who again laid his hand upon his arm, startled and interrupted him.

"Damned fool!" he exclaimed, "so ye're at it ag'in."

He turned his gaze towards the door as he spoke, and the reader may imagine the villain's consternation and confusion, when he beheld from the partially open door, the forbidding countenance of the ruffian Dick Nibbles glaring full upon him with a malicious grin of exultation, and he could hear the half stifled laugh of others behind him who were peering over his shoulder.

With a frightful yell of rage and terror, the discomfited villain rushed to the heap of money, covering it with both hands, and endeavouring to scramble it, together with the notes into his pocket, but before he could do so, the room door was flung wide open, and Dick Nibbles, and several of the other ruffians entered, Beaufort trembling in every limb with the most abject fear.

"Don't disturb yourself," said Dick, sarcastically, "only just allow us to assist you to count that small trifle of blunt. It's very pleasant amusement. I sympathise with you in your bad night's work, my knowing Sprig of Myrtle. Honour amongst thieves, you know. We go whacks, of course."

"Stand off—stand off, damn yer all!" cried Filcher, in a hoarse voice, "this here blunt is mine, it—it's vot I've saved, an' d'yer think I'm going to be robbed of it?"

"We shall see," returned Dick Nibbles, coolly, and advancing towards the table, followed by his companions, "don't excite yourself, you may as well take everything quietly since you're bowled out, and can't help yourself."

"Stand back, I say," repeated Filcher, fiercely, and drawing a pistol from his pocket, "I am desperate; by all the infernal host I swear, the first as advances another step, or offers to lay a finger upon a single coin of this here blunt, I'll lodge a couple of bullets in his head."

"Gammon," returned Dick, coolly "we'll see about that."

He struck the wrist of Sam Filcher, with a thick stick he had with him, as he spoke, which compelled him to drop the pistol, at the same moment two of his companions rushed forward, and seizing the villain by the arms, in spite of his violent struggles secured him.

The expression of Sam's savage features was perfectly demonical, and he foamed at

the mouth like a mad dog, while Nibbles deliberately gathered up the money, and depositing it in his pocket, said with an ironical grin of exultation—

"With or without your permission, Mr. Sam Filcher, I'll just take charge of this lot, and thus remove an immense weight of anxiety from your mind. When we have counted it, we shall see what is coming to your share and that of your particular friend the captain, here."

Filcher tried to speak, but his voice was choked with passion, and Dick Nibbles walked towards the door, and motioning to the men who held the miscreant, they released him, and were about to follow, when Sam rushed madly and desperately forward, but staggered back alarmed and defeated, when Nibbles presented the pistol he had dropped, with a grin of triumph.

"Don't agitate yourself, my dear fellow," said Dick, with a biting sarcasm, "lest you should make yourself ill; take it coolly."

With these words Dick and his companions quitted the room, closing the door after them.

For a minute or two after they were gone, Sam Filcher was paralysed to the spot, and his blood-shot eyes glared upon vacancy; but at length, with a frightful and unnatural yell, he rushed to the door and tried to open it, but with increased rage and terror found that it was fastened, and that himself and Beaufort were consequently prisoners.

With a frightful execration he staggered back to his seat, and sinking on it, covered his face with his hands, and groaned again in the perfect fury of his excited feelings.

As for Beaufort, the state to which he was reduced by complete childish terror, may be better imagined than described, and that terror was increased when he found that they were secured in the room, and were therefore at the mercy of the ruffians, from whom after the manner in which they had attempted to deceive them, they had every reason to fear the worst.

The terrible excitement which the disappointed Sam Filcher evinced, also added to his fears, for he well knew that upon him he would heap all the fury of his rage, and which he had not the courage to encounter.

"Now may eternal curses light upon those who have done this here!" at last exclaimed Filcher, starting fiercely from his seat, and again staring with blood-shot eyes around him, "they have bested old Sam Filcher, and made him look like a fool, arter all the trouble he has taken. But ye're the cause of all; they'd not have had no suspicion about the blunt if it hadn't been for yer looks down stairs when they kevestuned us. Damn yer, I say, yer've been the cause of our losing von of the finest chances as we've had for some time."

"It was no fault of mine, Sam," replied Beaufort, "but your own foolish obstinacy in not believing me when I said that there was some one listening at the door."

"Yer lie!" retorted Sam, savagely, and fixing upon him a threatening look; "vell, a pretty mess ve've made on it, lost every farden of the money it cost me so much trouble to obtain."

"And crime," said Beaufort, "I was certain that a curse would follow so atrocious an act, and I told you so."

"Cease, vill yer," said Sam, passionately; "to think that old Sam Filcher, the Sprig of Myrtle, should be thus sucked in; oh, I will have rewenge for this."

"You will not have the opportunity of doing so," said Beaufort, "we are prisoners, and we may consider ourselves fortunate if these fellows do not betray us to the officers of justice."

"They must not, they dare not," returned Filcher, with an oath, "they would by so doing betray their own necks into the halter at the same time. But to be robbed of sich a rich booty in that here manner. Thief rob thief, oh, damn it."

Having thus given vent to his enraged feelings, Sam again advance to the door, and tried it, but it was fastened sure enough, and resisted all his efforts to open it.

"They've locked an' bolted it, no doubt," he remarked, "an' they've got us, therefore, safe enuff. So I s'pose ve must try to make our miserable lives happy here till the morning, or till sich times as they chooses to let us out. Vell, it's no use fretting, an' though its very haggerawating I'm not goin to break my heart about it."

Thus trying to console himself under so unforeseen and severe a trial, the villain was about to return to his seat, when loud laughter from below arrested his steps, and again extorted from him a bitter oath.

"Ah, yer may vell laugh," he said, "yer've got the best of this here round, and no mistake. I shall never forgive myself for being so taken in. A nice little haul this here is for 'em, an' coming so unexpected, an' vithout not no trouble. Never mind, I'll be von vith 'em for it, or my name's not Sam Filcher. How they must chuckle as they counts over the blunt, vich they're doing just now, I dare say. Damn 'em all, I say again."

The laughter of the ruffians below was repeated at intervals, and Sam Filcher in a state of excitement which needs no description, returned to his seat, where leaning his elbow on the table, and resting his head upon his hand he resigned himself to his own gloomy ruminations, while Beaufort, who did not venture to make use of any observations, sat wretched and silent and anticipating the worst

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

THE RUIN AND DESPAIR OF HENRY ASHFORD.

Two days had now elapsed since the fatal destruction of the farm of Henry Ashford by fire, and nearly the whole of the property that unfortunate young man had possessed; and two wretched days had they been to all those who were interested in the dreadful catastrophe.

And who was there who knew the industrious young farmer, and those who were immediately connected with him, who did not deeply sympathise with them, and loudly execrate the atrocious miscreants who had caused such misery and desolation.

So terrible was the shock which it had caused our heroine and Amy, that at times they were excited almost to madness, and were totally incapable of offering Henry the least consolation.

But Henry's fortitude completely forsook him under so dreadful and severe a trial, and he was for some time perfectly inconsolable.

And no wonder; he found himself at one terrible blow, reduced to a state of comparative beggary, and had it not been for the kindness of the excellent Mr. Stubbles, deprived of a place wherein to shelter his head, and those of the fair and gentle beings who were dearer to him than his own life. And what prospect was there of his ever being able to recover himself? None that he could see, and the longer he reflected on it, the greater did his anguish and despair become.

It is almost unnecessary to state that the unfortunate sufferers had taken up their residence at the hospitable mansion of Mr. Stubbles, who, with his excellent and kind-hearted wife, exerted himself to the very utmost to make them as comfortable as possible, under the melancholy circumstances, but the calamity was so great that it was difficult to know in what way to meet it.

Every means were adopted that might lead to the apprehension of the villains who had been the cause of so much misery—for there could no longer be the slightest doubt that the fire was the work of incendiaries—but at present with very little, if any chance of success, as there was no one to whom the least suspicion could attach, and the terrible event was involved in the deepest mystery.

Melancholy indeed was the spectacle which the blackened ruins of the once happy home of Henry, Amy, and Phoebe now presented, and no one could behold it without feelings of the deepest emotion, and of the utmost horror and abhorrence of the wretches who had perpetrated the monstrous crime, and without expressing a fervent wish that some

thing would yet occur to bring them to punishment. It seemed scarcely possible that there could be miscreants in existence who could be guilty of so hideous a crime.

The melancholy event, as has been before stated, caused the most painful sensation among all classes of the community in the immediate neighbourhood and for miles around, and several influential individuals had personally expressed their sympathy with Henry, and generously offered him pecuniary assistance in his unmerited difficulties, but which for the present were respectfully declined.

It was on the second day after the conflagration that Henry Ashford was seated in the parlour of the mansion where he now found an asylum, if possible, in a greater state of anguish and despair of mind than he had previously experienced since the awful calamity which had so cruelly destroyed his hopes and expectations.

Phoebe and Amy were present, and their pale and careworn features, the anxiety of their looks, and the tears that trembled in their eyes, sufficiently expressed the torturing emotions that wrung their hearts, and distracted their brains. It would have been difficult to conjecture which of them suffered the most, but it was quite evident that the grief of them both was most acute, and almost insupportable.

Henry pressed his hands upon his burning forehead, and sobs and sighs of heart-rending agony frequently heaved his manly bosom, which, in spite of all his efforts, he found it utterly impossible to restrain.

Our heroine and Amy knelt on either side of him, watching him with the most intense and indescribable commiseration and anxiety but in silence, for they scarcely dared to interrupt the sacredness of his grief, and completely at a loss for words to offer him consolation.

In this attitude they all three remained for some minutes, and not a word was spoken, although their hearts were full even to bursting.

But at length Henry removed his hand from his forehead, and gazed at the fair beings before him with an expression of countenance, such as it would be difficult to find any language sufficiently eloquent to pourtray.

He struggled violently with his feelings, and tried to speak, but he could not, and beating his breast, he groaned, and once more covering his face with his hands, he sunk back in his chair, and again abandoned himself to the ungovernable emotions which racked his brain, and raged like a tempest in his breast.

Again a silence of several minutes ensued, which was broken only by sobs and sighs,

but at length Phoebe, with much difficulty was enabled to speak.

"Dear Henry," she said, in a voice tremulous with emotion, "for the love of heaven do not give way to this dreadful agony of grief, or it will overturn your reason, it will drive you mad."

Henry started as if from some frightful dream, at the sound of her voice, and the words she had uttered, and gazing at her with a wild and vacant look, he exclaimed:—

"Mad! mad! yes, I am mad! my brain seems to be on fire, and despair and horror absorb every other feeling in my breast. And can I be otherwise when I view the frightful prospect which is now placed before me, and which no ray of sunshine can ever again illumine? The wrath of heaven has fallen upon my devoted head, I feel myself a wretch accursed, and the sooner I am dead the better."

"Forbear Henry," ejaculated his sister with a look and in a voice of gentle remonstrance; "forbear again to utter such rash words as those which you have just now spoken, and try to bear this too terrible calamity with the fortitude which becomes a Christian and a man. Dreadful indeed is the trial, but the Almighty will not forsake you while you put your trust in Him."

"Oh, how wildly, how vainly do you talk, Amy," he replied; "am I not ruined, beggared, all the fruits of my labour, and many anxious hours cruelly destroyed, and are not poor Phoebe and yourself involved in the fearful calamity? What hope, what consolation is there then for me?"

He once more beat his breast, and groaned as he uttered these melancholy words, and they were all too much overpowered by their feelings to speak again for a few minutes, and a dismal silence, far more torturing, again ensued.

At length Henry looking at them with the same intensity of anguish, once more spoke:—

"Alas!" he sighed, "can I believe otherwise than that our doom is sealed, and that it is useless, entirely useless, longer to seek to avoid it? Oh, how cruelly, how fearfully have all the bright visions of future happiness which I so fondly cherished been annihilated, and how dreadful and disheartening is the prospect now before me. Turn my thoughts in whatever direction I may, there is nothing but misery and despair to encounter them. But oh, I could be content to suffer myself, and that without a murmur of complaint, were it not that you my sister, ever my warmest, my best earthly friend in weal and woe, and you my dear Phoebe, must be partakers of my sorrows, the innocent sharers in all the terrible cares, the anxieties, and afflictions that now assail me, and from which there is no escaping. What

agony, what insupportable agony is there in that thought. Poverty, squalid poverty is now our unavoidable, our inevitable lot, I dare not think of Phoebe as my bride, without even possessing a beggar's hovel to which to take her. My heart will surely break."

"Henry," said Phoebe, in a feeble and tremulous voice, taking his hand, tears trembling in her eyes, and her looks fully testifying the sincerity of the affectionate words she uttered; "to you have I pledged my woman's fondest vows of love, to you have resigned my heart throbbing in all its devotion and undying constancy, are not our fates already united, indissolubly united in all but the formal ceremony? and think you that time or circumstances can ever alter those sentiments I have so often, I again solemnly acknowledge towards you? That because adversity has unhappily overtaken you, I could cast you from me as something worthless, despicable, and abandon you in the midst of your sorrow and misery? Never, never, dear Henry; oh, how I should despise and loathe myself, did I believe that I were capable of such conduct, and how much, how cruelly would you wrong me, could you but for a moment seriously entertain that thought. In weal or woe, in poverty, in sorrow and adversity, dear, dear Henry, I am your's, your's only!"

The emotions that laboured in her bosom choked her further utterance, and she threw herself in his arms sobbing hysterically.

And oh, how wonderful was the change which her fervent and affectionate observations wrought in the appearance of her lover. The instantaneous effect was truly magical; the dark clouds of sorrow that had before dwelt upon his countenance dispersed, his eyes brightened, and straining her to his bosom with the most indescribable affection, he exclaimed:—

"Blessed words, that raise my very soul from the lowest depths of despair to heaven, oh, what language can I find sufficiently powerful to describe the mingled feelings they excite in my breast, and which almost bewilder my senses? Oh, how cruel and ungenerous was I, dear Phoebe, even by a word, or a look to imply a doubt of the sincerity of your love, your ever fervent emotion, under any circumstances however painful to me. Pardon me, best and most beloved of women, pardon my rash tongue; Phoebe Mayfield still loves me, she is mine, and mine only, and with that blissful assurance I will learn to smile at sorrow, and endeavour with fortitude to brave and battle with every adversity that may assail me."

He strained her delicate and graceful form more fervently than before, and imprinted the fondest kisses of pure affection upon her



lips and cheeks, while Amy gazed at them with feelings of satisfaction and tender sympathy which it is needless to describe.

At that interesting moment they were interrupted by a knock at the room door, which being opened by Amy, Mr. and Mrs. Stubbles entered.

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

SAM FILCHER AND BEAUFORT PRISONERS.

"Vell," observed Sam Filcher, after he had passed some time in meditations of not the most agreeable description, and nearly exhausted all his vocabulary of oaths, "this here's very pleasant, an' no mistake. I never vos so licked in my life afore; but I

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s'pose there's no alterin' it to-night, so ve may as vell resign ourselves to our fate. Here ve air, as nicely caged as possible, an' can't help ourselves. Who'd ha' thought it? Don't yer hate yerself, captain?"

Beaufort looked as though he not only hated himself, but everything and everybody else; but whatever his thoughts were, he wisely kept them to himself, and did not condescend an answer to the question of Sam Filcher, knowing that he was not in one of the most amiable of humours, and that he was not likely to meet with anything else from him but taunts and abuse.

"They've stole a march on us any how," remarked Filcher, "an' although it's very wexing an' haggerawating to the mind, I can't help giving them credit for it, an' not no mistake. I'll be von vith 'em, never fear.

Sam Filcher's not a goin' to be done brown in this here sort of vay, without having a go in hisself, depend on it. But it's no use settin' here grumblin'. Air yer ready to roost, captain?"

"Presently," replied Beaufort.

"Oh, very vell, then I am; so here goes," said Sam.

He merely took off his coat and waistcoat and boots, and then rolling into the bed, and drawing the bed-clothes over his head, in a few seconds he was sound asleep and snoring loudly.

Beaufort kept his seat, and abandoned himself to the dismal and torturing thoughts that crowded upon his brain.

Never had he felt more truly wretched than he did at that moment, and the most powerful and irresistible fears haunted his imagination.

Now that they were known to the ruffians in the house as the parties who had been guilty of the atrocious crime perpetrated that night, Beaufort considered that they were not safe for a minute, they might at any time betray them and deliver them into the hands of justice, and he felt confident that they would do so, if himself or Filcher should offend them.

The danger of their situation had been bad enough before, but now to be at the mercy of such reckless and determined villains, was to stand upon the very threshold of a prison, and the longer the wretched Beaufort brooded over it the greater did his fears become.

What added greatly to his alarm and suspicions was the fact that the fellows had already made them prisoners, and he racked and bewildered his brain to no purpose to endeavour to conjecture what would be the result of this terrible adventure.

He looked at Sam Filcher with an expression of disgust, and wondered how the miscreant, with such a terrible weight of crime upon his conscience, could sleep so soundly, but it was evident that nothing disturbed him in his sleeping moments, for his features bore the same stolid expression as usual, and he snored so loudly that he might even have been heard outside the house.

Could he have escaped from this villain, Beaufort thought, the heartless villain who seemed to delight in deeds of the most atrocious character, to commit them wantonly, and with a sort of fiendish satisfaction, and avoid him in future, he could be comparatively easy, and might avert that ignominious fate which now seemed to be inevitable, and which it was impossible for the wretched guilty man to contemplate without feelings of the greatest horror.

He would go to sea, or seek some foreign land where he should be unknown, and en-

deavour for the future to live by honest means, and to make all the atonement in his power for his past crimes, by the most fervent and sincere penitence.

But, alas, too well he knew that there was no chance, no prospect of his being able to realise that wish, the fates of himself and the villain Filcher were too closely linked together for them to be separated, and Beaufort therefore could see nothing else but an awful and shameful death before him, and he wrung his hands in the agony of horror and despair.

He recalled every incident of that fearful night to his memory, and he shuddered still more as he reflected upon them, and the frightful fate which had but too probably befallen to the whole of the unfortunate inmates of the farm, considering the fierce rapidity with which the flames had spread, and that they had all retired to rest when the act of incendiarism was committed.

"It was the work of a fiend," he muttered to himself, "no human mind however cruel could conceive so hellish a deed. The sight of the miscreant Filcher now fills me with greater horror than ever."

He paused, and looked fearfully towards the bed, for Filcher had ceased snoring, and presently he yawned, rubbed his eyes, and fixed them upon Beaufort with an angry expression.

"Hollo!" he cried, in surly tones, "air yer still up? Vot air yer goin' for to do? Have yer no regard for yer preshus health, thus a depriving yerself of yer nat'ral rest? Air yer goin' to sit there all night?"

"Why should you trouble yourself about me?" replied Beaufort, sullenly. "Go to sleep again, that's all you've got to care about."

"Air yer goin' to sit there all night moping, I ax agin?" interrogated Sam.

"Perhaps I shall."

"Praps yer von't."

"Indeed? am I a child?"

"Ye're not much better," answered Sam, sneeringly; "at any rate, ye're a reg'lar old 'oman. Come along, I say, vot's the use of sittin' there shivering. Come along to bed; a good snooze would do yer a world of good, captain."

"I can't sleep, I know," returned Beaufort, "and its no use my coming to bed."

"Ye're a fool."

"Thank you for the compliment, its one that I'm quite used to, you have paid it me so frequently."

"Cos yer desarved it. Air yer coming to bed, I vonce more ax?"

"No."

"Then sit up an' be damned, an' henjoy the society of those here preshus ghosts an' hobbergoberlin's as ye're alwus a fancying

Here's hoff again. I shall be as sound as a old Charley in a minit, I know."

The worthy gentleman was as good as his word, and rolling himself in the bed-clothes, he soon snored, if possible, more loudly than before, while Beaufort continued seated at the foot of the bed, and wrapped in the same gloomy train of thought which previously occupied his mind.

Still he could not banish the idea of escaping entirely from his brain, and he was at length prompted once more to try the room-door, in the wild and delusive hope that Sam and himself might have been mistaken, but could not help uttering an oath of disappointment when he was again convinced that it was fastened, and himself and Filcher prisoners in that haunt of infamy, and at the mercy entirely of the villains from whom they had everything to fear, and who would doubtless be incited to revenge in consequence of their having attempted to deceive them.

He was surprised to hear by the sound of their voices from below, that the ruffians had not yet retired to rest, but seemed to be regaling and enjoying themselves in the same manner as they had been doing on their arrest in the evening, no doubt greatly exhilarated by the rich booty, which had so unexpectedly fallen into their hands.

He returned to the foot of the bed, and placing his elbows on his knees, and resting his chin upon his hands, he again abandoned himself to the most gloomy and torturing meditations.

Suddenly, as a strange and extravagant thought occurred to him, he sprang from his seat, and hastily approached the window, through which the moon was now gleaming, and tried it.

To his infinite satisfaction and the renewal of his hopes, he found that it was unfastened, and gently raising it, he looked out on to the heath, which in the moonlight was fully revealed to him. The prospect of liberty, in the excitement of the moment seemed before him. He examined eagerly the distance of the window from the earth, and found that although it was not great, it would be almost impossible to drop from the window with safety.

At first his mind was so confused and agitated, that he did not observe that the task to escape from the window was not such a difficult one to accomplish as he had imagined.

The room was on the first story, and at the back of the premises—which were so situated that a view of the heath could be obtained from any part—and immediately beneath the window was the slated roof of a shed or out-house attached to the building, and which might be gained with comparative

ease, and to leap from which to the earth would be attended with little or no danger.

The thought elated him, and inspired him with more energy and resolution than usual.

He withdrew for an instant from the window, and walked cautiously towards the bed—as Sam had again suddenly left off snoring—to ascertain before he made the attempt, whether the artful ruffian was really asleep or only feigning.

He passed the lamp two or three times across his eyes in order to test him, but Filcher appeared to sleep as soundly as ever, and anxious and hopeful—for the silence that now reigned throughout the house now convinced him that the fellows had at last retired to rest—Beaufort again noiselessly approached the window, and having looked anxiously out to see that there was no one looking about to observe him, though it was not likely that there would be at that unseasonable hour, he prepared himself to make the determined attempt on which so much depended.

He had got one leg out of the window, resting himself on the window-sill, when he was startled by a fearful oath, and turning hastily around with an exclamation of alarm, his disappointment and dismay may be imagined, when he beheld Sam Filcher sitting upright in the bed and glaring fiercely upon him.

CHAPTER CXL.

THE RAGE OF FILCHER.

Before Beaufort could recover from his confusion or terror, or utter a word, Sam Filcher with another frightful oath, bounded from the bed towards him, and grasping him by the collar, dragged him from the window to the middle of the room, Beaufort being too much overpowered by fear to be much more use than a child in his hands.

"Damn yer," exclaimed Filcher, in a hoarse voice, shaking his fist in his face, and seeming half inclined and resolved to strike him, "damn yer, cowardly dog, sneaking cur, so yer thought to guv me the go-by, take leg-bail, did yer? Yer thought I vos asleep did yer? More t'other. I'm more than a match for yer at any time; I should be ashamed of myself if I van't. That here's yer gratitood towards a old pal, who's never deserted yer under not no circumstances votsoimdever, no not nivr?"

"Would that you had," said Beaufort, with a groan, and releasing himself from the rough hold of Filcher, "would that you had, I say, or that we had never met. You are my curse, the fiend who has lured me into participation in every hideous crime, and

take a savage delight to torture me. Why should I submit to this? to become the mere tool or plaything of such a miscreant as you?"

"For this here wery plain an' simple reason," returned Sam, with a malignant look of exultation, "cos as how yer can't help yerself."

Beaufort again groaned, and averted his looks from the forbidding features of Sam Filcher, who thus continued in the same strain:—

"Yer can't help yerself, and never will be able, that here's more, put that here in yer pipe an' smoke it. Hark yer, captain, if yer wouldn't like to take the konsekenesses, yer'll jist cut these here tricks in future, if yer only gets my ami'bel temper into full sving, I fancy yer'll have good cause to be sorry for it, when its too late. Mind that."

"Villain!" returned Beaufort, affecting an unusual degree of courage and determination, which he was far from feeling, "I will no longer suffer myself to be intimidated by your threats. I scorn them, I defy them."

"Yer dare not?"

"Dare not?"

"Yer dare not, I say again," repeated Sam, with a savage look; "that here's plain English, isn't it? Ve're so connected together, that not nuffin' can part us, no, not nuffin'. An' that ought to be a great consilashun to yer, only yer've turned sich an hungraytful warmint. Anybody but yer would feel proud an' happy in a pursessing the friendship of old Sam Filcher the Sprig of Myrtle."

"Taunting scoundrel—"

"Hold 'ard, captain, don't hinsult me, cos I'm not in the humour to stand it. Better language, better language. I'll jist take the liberty to shut that here vinder? Ye're not a going to cut yer stick that here vay, I can tell yer. Vhy yer might have broke that here preshus neck of yourn, if yer'd attempted it."

"Since you affect to despise me so much," said Beaufort, "why do you seek to detain me?"

"Cos it's my fancy to do so," replied Filcher, with an exulting grin; "asides, there's many things ve've got to do together yet, an' ye're not a going to sneak hoff shabby, not no how. Yer may as vell sit down now, an' make that here miserable life of yourn happy. I'll keep yer comp'ny, for it'll soon be daylight, an' I've had jist as much sleep as I wants now."

The wretched Beaufort returned no answer, but passively obeyed in despair, and Sam Filcher having closed the window, filled and lighting his pipe, and taking a seat opposite his companion, and for a few minutes fixed his keen and penetrating eyes upon his

countenance with a look of mingled triumph and scorn.

"The loss of the blunt sticks in my gizzard," he at length observed, "an' I shan't be satisfied till I've had a hexplanashun about it. Only to think that ve should be so clean suck'd in."

"It was all your own fault," said Beaufort, "you would not heed my warning, so the fellows became acquainted with the secret, and the money fell into their hands."

"An' yer're glad on it, I s'pose?" said Sam.

"I do not regret it," replied Beaufort, "although I would much rather it had been restored to him from whom it was so cruelly taken."

"Now vot a preshus hidewot, yer air," retorted Sam, "tho' its only a vaste of time to talk to yer. I tells yer again these here fellers air not a going to do me so easy. They've not got a flat to deal vith, an' I think as how they knows that here."

"They hold us completely in their power," observed Beaufort, "and we had better be cautious how we act towards them."

"Bah!"

"You may affect to treat what I say with contempt, but I do not believe you. Should they betray us into the hands of justice—"

"They dare not."

"Dare not?"

"They dare not do so, I repeat."

"Why so?"

"Vhy air yer blind or silly altogetther?" replied Sam; "don't they mean sticking to the blunt if they can? How can they then turn snitch upon us? Arn't the receiver vorse than the thief, anyhow?"

Beaufort could not exactly combat this reasoning, so he did not attempt it.

"The detaining us here prisoners," said he, "is a proof of the desperate means they mean to resort to against us."

"There don't yer go for to let that here flurry yer," returned Sam, "for it'll be all right presently. It vos rayther a bold trick of 'em to turn the key on us, but it vos only to save all bother jist then."

"Sam," said Beaufort, with a half imploring look, "I cannot place any confidence in these ruffians after what has occurred. The opportunity is now afforded us to escape, and to be far away from here before they are stirring. Come, let us away."

"Not I," replied Filcher, resolutely.

"Why not?"

"Cos in the first place I'm not sich a rank cur as yerself," answered Sam, "an' in the second I'm not a going away till I've had a hexplanashun, an' come to some satisfactory arrangement. I'll have the blunt returned, or at any rate I'll have a shy for it."

"Curses will surely light on the fearful transactions of last night," said Beaufort.

"Let them," replied Sam Filcher carelessly, "they will not affect me the least in the world. Now captain, no more of this here useless talk; yer an' I should understand each other by this time. Vot's the use of trying to haggerawayte me?"

"Why do you take such a savage delight in taunting and torturing me?" demanded Beaufort.

"Cos ye're alwus down on yer luck about nuffin," answered Sam, "an' getting sich strange fancies in yer ed, but only say as how yer'll be better for the future, an' ve'll say not no more about it."

Beaufort thought it was better to agree with that proposition, as there was no coming to any reasonable terms with Filcher, and the latter amiable individual having finished the contents of his short pipe, knocked out the ashes, and returning it to his pocket, commenced whistling most melodiously, as though nothing whatever had occurred to disturb his mind, or to ruffle his temper in the least.

Beaufort cast many an anxious look towards the window and the door, but more particularly the former, and he inwardly cursed bitterly the misfortune that had frustrated his design to escape, and, if possible, hereafter to avoid the determined and heartless scoundrel Filcher, at the very moment when that escape seemed certain.

He also trembled as the time approached when Dick Nibbles and his ruffianly associates in guilt were likely to make their reappearance, lest the conduct of Filcher should excite their utmost rage and indignation against them both, and be productive of the most serious consequences.

He, however, endeavoured to conceal those thoughts from the observation of Filcher, who nevertheless evidently penetrated them, though he said nothing about them.

It was now the dull glimmer of early dawn, and soon the noise which proceeded from below showed that the lawless inmates of the old house were astir, and the fears and anxiety of Beaufort increased, especially when the sound of footsteps might be heard ascending the stairs to the room in which they were so strongly imprisoned.

"Now for it," he said, in a tone which showed he was fully prepared himself for the meeting; "they're coming. Now, captain, d'yer hear? Ye'd better mind vot I've said to yer, an' mind how yer behave, leave all the talkin' an' the argyin' to me, an' I varrant they'll find me more than a match for em; don't yer say not nuffin votsom-dever."

Beaufort made no reply, and directly afterwards the door was unbolted, and the ruffian Dick Nibbles, attended by the same fellows who had accompanied him the night before,

all armed, entered the room, and advanced towards them.

Sam Filcher did not offer to move from his seat, however, and eyed them with the most perfect scorn and indifference, but Beaufort in spite of the warning which the former had given him, felt the greatest fear, and which he was quite unable to conceal.

"How do you feel yourselves after your night's lodgings?" inquired Dick, ironically.

"Pretty comfortable under the circumstances," answered Sam, with perfect coolness; "I hope yer had pleasant dreams arter that here little trick yer played upon me?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the fellow, triumphantly, "it was a fine bowl out. You'd better have acted honourable, Sam, and told us all about it."

"Yer don't mean to stick to the tin, do yer?" said Sam.

"Of course we do."

"Vot, every farden of it?"

"No, you and the captain here may come in for your shares; but all depends upon circumstances," replied Dick.

"Then damn yer all," exclaimed Sam, in tones of the greatest anger, and clenching his fists.

"Bravo, Sam, that's very flattering," said Dick, again laughing.

"Yer've bested me this time," said the enraged villain, "and may vell afford to laff; but if I don't be you vith yer, an' have my rewenge afore long, my name's not Sam Filcher."

"The less you threaten the better," remarked Nibbles, with a significant look.

"D'yer think to alarm me?" remarked Sam, with a look of the most ineffable contempt, "old Sam Filcher is rayther too old upon the turf for that here. Vot d'yer vant now?"

"Merely for you and the captain to attend us below."

"Oh, wery vell, lead the vay; the sooner this here delicate b'sness is settled the better."

Dick Nibbles and his companions moved towards the open door, followed by Filcher and Beaufort, and they descended the stairs to the room in which the other lawless ruffians were assembled; Beaufort, as might be expected, being in the greatest state of doubt and anxiety as to what would be the result of this unpleasant and dangerous adventure.

CHAPTER CXLI.

WHAT FOLLOWED THE FIRE AT THE FARM.

Another week had now elapsed since the terrible calamity that had happened to Henry Ashford, and by the unremitting ex-

ertions of his excellent friends, his excited feelings had somewhat calmed down, and he might be said to be comparatively composed and resigned.

To this sudden, happy, and unexpected change, the affecting scene which had taken place between himself and our heroine, and which has been fully described in a previous chapter, had greatly tended. He was now fully assured of her constancy and self-devotion, if indeed he could ever for an instant have entertained a doubt or suspicion upon the subject, and that was more than sufficient to remove a mountain of care and anxiety from his mind; and in spite of the dark and heavy clouds that now hung upon the horizon of his fate, to re-awaken those fond hopes of future happiness which he had always, and with so much apparent reason indulged in.

It had been resolved by Mr. Stubbles—in whose hospitable mansion Henry, his sister, and our heroine were still residing—to rebuild the farm with as little delay as possible. and to re-establish Henry in it, giving him every means to commence the world again, and in that benevolent object he received the most generous assistance of his wealthy friends and neighbours, by whom Henry Ashford was held in the highest esteem, while everything was done in that considerate and unostentatious way that it could not possibly wound the feelings, however sensitive they might be.

A number of artizans and labourers were immediately set to work; the ruins were speedily cleared, and the erection of a new building was commenced with such zeal and energy which seemed to promise its rapid completion.

Henry, Phoebe, and Amy were almost constantly in each other's society, in fact that was their greatest solace in the severest hours of their affliction, and they were restless and unhappy when they were apart from each other.

And oh, what were the feelings of our heroine to know that she was now residing under the same roof as her unfortunate parent, and that unknown and unobserved she might with her own gentle hand contribute to those little comforts which the poor old man required in his awful situation? We need not attempt the arduous task to describe them, for the reader will be able the more easily to imagine them.

She had frequent opportunities of seeing him, without any fear of being observed by him, and every evening she would watch him in his slumbers, gaze with a bursting heart upon his aged and careworn features, weep tears of agony which no effort could restrain, and kneeling by the side of his couch offer up her fervent prayers to heaven

for his restoration, and that he might not only recognise her, but utter his forgiveness and parental benediction, and receive her again to that throbbing heart from which she had been so long estranged. But, alas, that prospect seemed to be as remote as ever.

That thought was of itself sufficient to dishearten her, but she kept up her spirits, under all the melancholy circumstances, much better than might have been expected, and still continued to hope on.

It was indeed so great a consolation to be permitted to be near the poor old man, and to watch him in his slumbers, which were usually tranquil, notwithstanding he might even have been rather violent in the day, that Phoebe could not help feeling a sort of melancholy happiness.

How often—even at the risk of waking him, and the painful and exciting consequences that were almost sure to follow—would she part his long silvery hair and imprint kisses of the most unbounded and indescribable affection upon his lips, his cheeks and forehead, and as she did so, scalding tears would chase each other down her cheeks, and sobs and sighs would escape her bosom.

Sometimes poor old Mark Mayfield would talk in his sleep, and murmur sentences referring to the happy days of the past, which showed that even his wandering and disordered senses were at times alive to reason, and it was that fact that strengthened the hope of his afflicted daughter as to his ultimate recovery.

But with what torturing feelings of anguish did Phoebe always listen to her unfortunate father in these, the moments of his slumbering fancies, and as she reflected upon all the chequered events of the past, how dismal were the events that presented themselves to her recollection, and excited in her bosom alternate feelings of regret, remorse, and bitter self-reproach.

Sometimes the sufferer would even breathe her name, but in a tone so low, and so peculiarly and indescribably tender, that she could scarcely hear it, but it thrilled to her heart, for it was sufficient to convince her that even in the deranged state of his intellect he had not entirely forgotten her, and that she at times formed the subject of his dreams.

This also afforded her consolation, and inspired her with hope.

The aged sufferer, attended by his keepers, took his daily walks when the weather permitted, in the extensive and romantic grounds at the back of the mansion, and from one of the windows which commanded an almost uninterrupted view, Phoebe had an opportunity of watching him in his perambulations, and the reader may imagine with what deep

feelings of melancholy interest it was that she did so, and with what emotions of poignant anguish she noticed his strange and childish antics, gambolling at times over the green sward, with all the playfulness of boyhood, at others stooping to gather a daisy, or some other simple wild-flower, and then laughing and shouting aloud in all the joyousness of unbounded mirth.

Sometimes, however, he would suddenly pause in the midst of all this boisterous hilarity, and assuming a melancholy attitude, perhaps placing his back against the trunk of an old tree, he would appear for a minute or two to be completely lost in thought. Then again in an instant he would arouse himself, and making the very air resound again with his laughter, he would bound over the ground with childish playfulness, closely followed by his keepers, who did not consider it safe to lose sight of him even for an instant.

And oh, how grateful did our heroine feel to the worthy Mr. Stubbles and his wife for their disinterested kindness and benevolence—she felt that she owed them a debt of gratitude which she could never sufficiently repay, and the more she thought of it the greater appeared to be the weight of the obligation. Had she been allied to them by the closest ties of kindred, they could not possibly have done more to serve her, or those immediately connected with her, with greater zeal.

Alas, what would have become of her poor father, at the time of his greatest affliction, had it not been for the unexampled kindness of the excellent squire and his lady, who had spared no expense that might tend to bring him relief, and when there was no one else in a condition to assist him? Phoebe shuddered at the thought of what would but too probably have been her father's aggravated fate, had it not been for such pure friendship and philanthropy, and she felt even more grateful than ever.

And the generous conduct of Mr. Stubbles towards Henry Ashford, particularly on the present occasion—could she ever enough admire it, or evince the feeling of gratitude with which it inspired her? It was impossible for her to do so.

Those feelings she sometimes expressed to Mr. Stubbles in language of the warmest description, but he always listened to her with impatience, and stopped the current of her thoughts.

"Pray, Miss Phoebe," he would observe, in his usual plain simple way, "do not seek to overwhelm me by giving me far more praise than is my due. I have done no more than was my duty, and heaven be thanked for having it in my power to do that. What is the use of money, only to

assist others who are not so well off as yourself, to aid the sick and distressed? None at all, and after supplying your own necessities, if you cannot find the heart to devote some of the surplus to such charitable purposes, why you might as well have so much dross."

"Excellent, sir," said Henry Ashford, who happened to be present when this conversation took place, and whose heart overflowed with gratitude, "what honour do the sentiments you have just now uttered do your head and heart. Would that all those whom fortune has favoured, possessed the same benevolent feelings, how little of misery would there be in the world. To you, my friend, my benefactor, how greatly am I indebted? I feel that I can never repay it, and I cannot find language to express myself as I would wish.

"No more, Master Ashford, if you please, that is, if you don't wish to offend me," returned the worthy old gentleman, rather impatiently, and becoming extremely nervous and fidgetty, as he was wont to do on such occasions, "you know I am a plain spoken man, and that I do not like flattery, so that the less you talk in that strain the better pleased I shall be. Of what use are we in the world, if we don't endeavour to do all the good we can? Besides, you know, I was not always rich, but God knows as poor as anyone, providence gave me wealth when I had never expected any, and since it is so, I'm determined that others, who stand in need of it, shall enjoy the benefits of it as well as myself."

Henry Ashford and his sister pressed the hands of the excellent man in silence, and our heroine looked on with an expression of countenance which fully showed how warmly she participated in their feelings.

"Ah, my friends," continued Mr. Stubbles after a pause, "I remember when I was only a simple ostler, and, Mrs. Stubbles as is now—bless her heart—was my fellow servant, how kind everyone was to us in the village, particularly Master Ashford and his sister, and you, Miss Phoebe, and your dear old parents too, though we were all poor and humble alike. I say I remember this, and I must be a scoundrel ever to forget it."

His fat jolly cheeks glowed again with the excitement of his feelings, and every expression of his good humoured countenance showed the sincerity of the words he had uttered.

"Lor bless me!" he said, "what have I got to be proud or vain about when I think of all these things? Besides, don't I recollect too, that I was once, when in London, only a poor flying pie-man, while Mrs. Stubbles—bless her dear heart, I say again—used to attend to the fried-fish shop, and eel pie

house, at home, up to her elbows in greas^e and pastry. "Ah," he added with a melancholy sigh, "those were pleasant times enough, and I almost regret that they have not to come over again."

"And I remember, too," remarked Henry, "who it was that helped to rescue my poor sister from brutal unmanly outrage, at that time, and also did all in their power to render myself and my sister all that friendly aid which our necessities so much required. It was you, sir, to whom?"

"Hold, Master Ashford," interrupted Mr. Stubbles, "I won't hear any more in that strain, I declare I won't. Ah, that Captain Beaufort, as he was then, and Sam Filcher, as he calls himself, are a couple of the greatest scoundrels I ever heard of, and it is wonderful how they have managed to escape the gallows, all these years."

"True," coincided Henry, "but depend upon it, sooner or later, that is in store for them."

"Oh, no doubt of that," remarked Mr. Stubbles, "it would be strange indeed if they should escape it. I tell you what I have often thought lately, Master Henry."

"What might that be, sir?" inquired the latter.

"That the burglary and the fire at the farm, was the work of those atrocious villains' hands."

"Ah!" returned Henry, "that idea, I confess has often occurred to me also, but in the absence of all proof it would be wrong to encourage it."

"They are just the sort of miscreants who are capable of such crimes," said Mr. Stubbles, "and have we not, therefore, a right to suspect them?"

"True," coincided Henry.

"And damme," ejaculated Mr. Stubbles, getting a little over excited, "I believe them to be the real guilty parties, and I'd hang them without judge or jury!"

Henry Ashford could hardly help smiling at the honest warmth of his manner, but there was much in what he had said which required serious consolation, and he determined not to lose sight of it.

"Why, it is not long ago," observed Mr. Stubbles, after a brief pause, "since they were known to be lurking in this neighbourhood, after no good, you may be sure, and didn't they appear before Miss Phoebe, and your sister, Master Henry, and insult them?"

"True, true."

"And that is confirmatory evidence of their guilt," said Mr. Stubbles, positively; "they were disappointed and defeated, and that would be sufficient with such scoundrels, to goad them on to vengeance, and their cupidity would tempt them to commit the robbery at the same time."

"These are very strong arguments against them, certainly, sir," remarked Henry.

"Strong arguments," repeated Mr. Stubbles, still more warmly; "why, they are unanswerable facts, besides, I heard only yesterday, that which all but positively confirms my suspicions."

"Indeed?" said Henry, with a look of eager curiosity.

"Yes," replied Mr. Stubbles, "when I was out yesterday, taking my usual morning walk, Roger Hobson, who you know is one of my tenants, came up to me, and asking my pardon, said that there was something particular he wished to speak to me about, and which he ought to have done before, but that, somehow, or other it had slipped his memory. He then informed me that in going across the heath on the evening that the fire occurred, he met two men going in the direction of the farm, whom he immediately recognised as Filcher and Beaufort, for he knows both the rascals well. They appeared to be intoxicated, for they laughed and talked loudly, but they seemed to take no notice of him, and he soon lost sight of them. There, Master Henry," added the worthy squire, triumphantly, "what do you think of that?"

"Why," replied Henry, "that it still more strengthens our suspicions, but does not positively confirm anything."

"Well, I say it does," returned Mr. Stubbles, who had evidently made up his mind to it, "and, if my surmises are not correct, I'll eat my hat. Nay, I'm so thoroughly convinced of their guilt, that I'm determined to offer a large reward out of my own pocket for their apprehension. Such villains must not be allowed to escape the gallows, while there's a chance of securing them."

To this Henry, of course agreed, but added:—

"It is a pity that Roger Hobson did not communicate this information before, for it might probably have led to some discovery."

"No doubt of it," replied Mr. Stubbles, "and it may not be too late now; at least I am resolved to do as I said, namely to offer a large reward for the apprehension of the villains, and then we shall see whether my surmises are right or not. I'm never far out in my reckonings."

"I cannot sufficiently thank you, sir," remarked Henry, "for the very great interest you take in all that concerns me."

"There now," said Mr. Stubbles, rather testily, "I see you are determined to offend me, whether or no; I've told you again and again that I do not require thanks for performing no more than my duty towards my fellow creatures. And I ask you, Master Ashford, whether you do not consider it is the bounden duty of every honest man to



bring two such atrocious scoundrels as these to justice if he can?"

"Certainly, sir," answered Henry.

"Well then," said Mr. Stubbles, "that is your opinion, and it is mine also, and that being the case, it is my determination to lose no time in taking the proper steps for their detection, and it shall be no fault of mine if they are not quickly in the hands of the law."

With these words Mr. Stubbles shook the hand of Henry, bowed politely to Phoebe and Amy, and quitted the room in a great bustle.

Henry could not but admit the truth of the worthy squire's observations, and his heart as he had expressed himself, indeed overflowed with gratitude towards him for his friendly feelings, and the great trouble

and interest he took in all that concerned his welfare.

In fact, without the possession of such an inestimable friend, after all the troubles that had befallen him, his total ruin, the destruction of all his future prospects, must have been inevitable.

In those grateful feelings Phoebe and Amy could not but participate, and they all continued to speak in terms of the highest eulogium of the kind-hearted Mr. Stubbles for some time after he had left them.

But to return particularly to Phoebe and her unfortunate father.

One fine summer afternoon, probably overcome by the heat of the weather, and fatigue from the exercise he had undergone in his customary rambles, the poor old man had sunk off to sleep in the old arm-chair in

which he usually sat, carefully watched by his keepers.

Phoebe was apprised of this fact, and eagerly seized the melancholy opportunity of again watching him in his slumbers, with the fond, but delusive hope that he might again awake to reason.

She went alone, for it was alone that she wished to perform her affectionate task, a task of love and duty, and to give free vent to her thoughts and feelings.

The keepers with thoughtful delicacy left the room immediately on her entrance, but remained within hail in case their services should be required.

A solemn silence reigned within the room, only broken by the low, calm breathing of the aged sufferer, and Phoebe felt a sensation of awe steal over her, as she stood upon the threshold, almost fearful to advance.

But at length she did so, with noiseless footsteps, lest the least sound should distract him, and thwart her in her wishes.

She reached the old arm chair, and kneeling beside it, gazed up in the venerable features of the old man with an intensity of feeling no language could possibly describe.

Those features were calm, perfectly calm, and so like what they used to appear in the days of happiness, that Phoebe was moved to tears.

There was that same benevolent expression—that same gentle look and smile of content, almost amounting to childish simplicity, which had ever characterised him in his happier days, and as our heroine continued to gaze—for it was impossible for her to remove her eyes from that venerable and beloved countenance—she could scarcely persuade herself that he was suffering under so terrible an affliction, or that all those dreadful events had taken place which now formed the sad chapters of their history.

But, alas, the fearful truth would force itself upon her too powerfully in spite of all her efforts, and filled her heart to bursting.

Still the old man slept as calmly as if he was reposing on a bed of down, and the sun was gently beaming in upon him from the honeysuckled casement.

Phoebe hesitated for a minute or two, fearful of disturbing the poor old man, but at length she could restrain her feelings no longer, and she imprinted a kiss of the most indescribable affection upon his careworn cheeks, which did not arouse him, and she could almost fancy that he smiled in his slumbers, as if in acknowledgment of that daughter's love whom he had discarded from his bosom, even before insanity had seized upon his brain, and probably learnt to curse and loathe her.

The thought was most torturing, and it was several minutes ere she could at all re-

cover from the effects of it. But at length she silently offered up a prayer to heaven, and she afterwards felt much more calm and collected.

She remained with her eyes fixed upon the countenance of her aged parent, indeed she could not, neither did she attempt to remove them, and again in melancholy retrospection all the fatal events of the past were presented to her memory, and her wounds might be said to bleed afresh.

Suddenly she started, for a murmuring sound escaped the old man's lips in his slumbers, and fearful that he was about to awake, and that the too sudden shock caused by her appearance might be productive of the most fatal consequences, she cautiously and hastily drew aside, and concealed herself behind a screen that was in the room, and from which she could observe all that passed, without being seen herself.

She listened with breathless attention and feelings of excitement, for her father still muttered incoherent words to himself in which she often imagined she heard him mention her name with affection, and her heart beat so violently against her side, and she was otherwise so much agitated that she could with difficulty support herself.

Another moment he commenced singing one of his old country ditties, in a voice so low, so touchingly plaintive, and so almost unearthly, that its effect, was sufficient to move even the most insensible person to tears, and the state of poor Phoebe's mind may therefore be readily imagined.

Convulsive sobs heaved her bosom, tears coursed each other rapidly down her cheeks, and so great indeed was her excitement that she could not without the greatest difficulty refrain from rushing forth from the place of her concealment and revealing herself to her unfortunate parent.

She looked from behind the screen, and could perceive that the old man's eyes were closed, that his lips scarcely seemed to move, though the plaintive sounds that so rivetted her attention and bewildered her senses, came from him, and that he evidently still slept.

The same calm and even cheerful expression irradiated his venerable features, which had before attracted Phoebe's attention, and nothing could possibly be more interesting and impressive than his appearance at that moment.

At length the aged sufferer ceased his song, having repeated every verse and every word correctly, and a silence ensued, which was broken only by his low breathing in his slumbers.

But Phoebe continued to listen with breathless attention and anxiety, and after a brief pause, she heard the poor old man dis-

tinently utter her name, and that, too, in the same accents of affection with which he had been wont to address her ere she had unfortunately strayed from the paths of rectitude, while his features for the moment seemed lighted up by the glow of reason, and his aged frame was violently agitated.

Our heroine drew in her breath, and such was the power of her emotion that she could with difficulty support her trembling limbs, or prevent a cry of mingled joy and pain escaping her lips.

Again the old man repeated her name, and in more distinct tones than before, and the spell of sleep was suddenly broken, and rising hastily from his seat he gazed vacantly but eagerly around him, clasping his hands together vehemently, then raising them to his head and pressing them to his temples, as if endeavouring to recal his wandering and disordered memory; while the violent and convulsive agitation of his frame was clearly perceptible.

The heart of Phoebe beat at more than double its wonted pace, and she could with difficulty contain herself. She watched her aged parent from behind the screen, and scarcely dared to breathe, lest the sounds should reach his ears and betray her.

The old man remained in the same fixed attitude for a minute or two, but suddenly he removed his hands from his face, and again looked earnestly around the room, as though he expected his eyes to encounter some beloved object. Then an expression of disappointment overspread his venerable countenance, and a deep sigh which seemed to come from the innermost recesses of his heart escaped his lips.

With what feelings of fear and expectation Phoebe watched him, and yet she could not help trembling lest he should discover her, and she felt that she had not strength or fortitude to endure the scene which would then be sure to follow.

That fear was increased when the old man moved slowly from the chair in which he had been sleeping, and advanced towards the screen behind which she was concealed.

He suddenly stopped before it, and once more pressing his hands upon his temples, while the momentary light of reason seemed to irradiate his features, he said—

“What—what cruel mockery be this? Methought I heard the gentle voice of my bonny bairn, my own dear Phoebe, call upon her poor old feyther's name, in that sweet, soft voice of affection that I did e'er hear her, an' which did e'er set my poor fond heart an' dame's a rejoicing. But she be not here, I do not see her pretty face smiling upon me; I do not feel her fair arms twined around my neck, her sweet lips, sweeter than the breath of summer flowers, pressed upon

this aged cheek. It must ha' been a dream. Oh, why do these bright delusive visions continue to haunt the poor old man's imagination, an' drive him on to madness. Phoebe—Phoebe, cruel girl, you ha' quite deserted your helpless aged feyther, an' left him all alone—all alone.”

With a groan of agony the wretched lunatic again sunk back in his old arm-chair, and buried his face in his hands.

And what were now the feelings of our heroine? They do not need to be described. It was not without the greatest difficulty that she could sufficiently control them to prevent her discovering herself.

And yet at that moment, when a faint portion of reason appeared to be restored to him, was it not the time to reveal herself, and to endeavour to recal him from the darkness in which his intellect had so long wandered? to remove the curse which he had doubtless invoked upon her head, and seek to obtain his forgiveness?

Ah, no, the last words which the poor old man had just uttered, were sufficient to annihilate all the hopes his previous observations might have created, and she could hardly suppress a groan of agony, despair, and disappointment.

A wild and fearful exclamation from her unfortunate parent startled Phoebe from these melancholy thoughts, and filled her breast with the most unbounded terror.

He had sprung from his chair, clasping his temples with his hands, his eyes wild and bloodshot, his limbs frightfully convulsed, his features distorted, and in fact, again exhibiting all the violence of the most confirmed madness, which his unhappy daughter gazed upon appalled.

“Take—take her from my sight,” he exclaimed in thrilling accents, and every word of which went to the heart of poor Phoebe, “let not the wanton torture an' disgrace ine with her presence. There be the harlot's brand upon her brow, the smile of hypocrisy on her features, the kiss of the libertine still poisons her lips, those lips round which the sweet smiles of innocence were wont to play. But they be all gone now, an' she be accursed. Nay, let her not come near me, lest I should strike her dead at my feet. Take her away—take her away.”

He swung his arms around, battling with some imaginary object as he thus spoke, and then overcome with the terrible excitement of his feelings the wretched man sunk inanimate on the floor, and Phoebe also became insensible.

CHAPTER CXLII.

HOPES AND FEARS.

The keepers, as has been before stated, had kept within a convenient distance, so that they might not appear intrusive, in case their services should happen to be required, and on hearing the wild exclamations of the poor old man, and those of his unfortunate daughter, they immediately entered the room, and having raised Mark Mayfield, and placed him on the bed, one of them conveyed our heroine with all expedition to the care of her friends, while the medical gentleman was quickly in attendance upon the hapless lunatic, who was raving wildly, and in the most alarming state of excitement.

So violent indeed was this paroxysm of the unfortunate old man's madness that he was compelled to be secured to the bed, and it required all the efforts of his keepers to at all control him, and in this melancholy and alarming condition he continued for the remainder of the day, and throughout the night, requiring constant attendance and the greatest care.

Henry, Amy, and Mr. and Mrs. Stubbles, were much alarmed on beholding the insensible and agitated state of Phoebe, and, of course, every means were adopted as quickly as possible to restore her to animation, which were promptly attended with success, and they elicited sufficient from her to give them some idea of the painful scene which had taken place, and to cause them to regret that she should in the delicate state of her health have exposed herself to such excitement.

Our heroine indeed felt even more than usually excited, and it needed all the exertions of her friends to soothe her. The hopes which the first observations of her afflicted parent had excited in her breast were completely crushed and destroyed by those which had followed, and the wild denunciations to which he had given utterance and she could not recal them to her memory without feelings of the utmost agony and despair.

It was to little or no purpose that Henry and his sister, aided by the kind efforts of the excellent Mr. Stubbles and his worthy partner, tried to tranquillise her, her feelings were too much excited to be easily composed, and the scene which she had witnessed was one which could never be effaced from her memory.

Never, never could she forget the fearful, the even frightful expression of her unfortunate father's countenance as he gave utterance to the terrible words regarding her, which had escaped his lips. With what bitterness, however, and even hatred he had

mentioned her name; her every faculty was enchained by terror at the remembrance, and she wrung her hands and beat her breast in the uncontrollable and insupportable agony of her despair.

A violent flood of tears came at last to her relief, and then her dismal lamentations and observations were piteous and heart-rending to listen to, and the agitation and alarm of Henry and his sister may be readily imagined. They knew not what to say, what to do, in order to restore her to anything like a degree of composure, and again and again they regretted that the poor girl should thus have exposed herself to a scene of anguish and excitement she was so ill prepared to encounter.

"Alas," ejaculated Henry, "when will these painful trials cease, and hope and happiness again dawn upon the fate of those who have already had to endure so much, and whose fortitude has been put to so severe a test?"

"Never—never," sighed our heroine, with looks of the greatest anguish, and tears chasing each other down her pale cheeks, as she spoke, and her voice almost choked by the violence of her emotions, "all hope is at an end, the fatal malady which has seized upon my unfortunate parent's brain is seated there for ever, and he will never recal my name to his wandering recollection without coupling it with a curse. The father who used to love me so fondly to curse his only child, and to view her with disgust and loathing; oh, horrible thought, is it not enough to drive my brain to madness?"

Again the poor girl's voice was stifled by convulsive sobs, and she wrung her hands in despair.

And how deeply affected was Henry and her other friends, how warmly did they sympathise with her in her sufferings, yet had they not the means or the power to offer her consolation, although they exhausted all their arguments and persuasions in endeavouring to do so.

"There seems to be a spell upon me," she sighed at length, "the cruel fates appear to have conspired against me, to mock at my misfortunes, and to work alone my thorough anguish, misery, and despair. Heaven has forsaken me."

"Forbear, Phoebe," remonstrated Henry, "you drive me to distraction to hear you talk thus. You arraign the mercy and justice of heaven by making use of such observations as those you have just now uttered."

"Bear with me, Henry," she sobbed, and fixing upon him a look of the most poignant and uncontrollable anguish, "I pray you bear with me, for my brain is bewildered, and I know not what I say. But, alas, does it not appear as if I were completely aban-

doned by providence? so vain are all my prayers, my penitence, so constant all my sorrows?"

"True," replied Henry, "but still believe, dear Phoebe, that it is but a further trial of your patience, fortitude, and resignation, and that heaven will in its own due time restore you to your former happiness, and fully repay you for all the sufferings you have undergone."

Our heroine shook her head mournfully, as she ejaculated—

"You are too sanguine in your expectations, Henry, "and I cannot but doubt whether you believe in that which you have just observed. Alas, what prospect is there at present of such wishes being realised?"

"All at present is gloomy and cheerless we must admit, Phoebe," remarked Amy, "but still you must endeavour to encourage the hope that the clouds will pass away."

"Ah," returned Phoebe, with a melancholy look, "how easy is it to advise, but after the many cruel disappointments it has been my lot to experience it would be little short of madness to again encourage hope. Alas, no, I see too plainly that my doom is sealed, and all that is now left for me to do is to endeavour to resign myself to it."

"Oh, would to heaven," said Henry, with much emotion, "that I could banish such gloomy and torturing ideas from your mind, and induce you to view the future on the brightest side. Deplorable even as is your unfortunate father's case at present, I cannot help still believing that he will sooner or later be restored to reason, and recognise you with all his former affection. But should it be the will of heaven that he shall not do so, you know it is your duty to endeavour to submit, and that, too, without a murmur of complaint."

"I know it is my duty—and no one is more mindful of that than myself—to do so, but after the many severe trials to which I have been put, the troubles, the vicissitudes I have had to undergo, without any prospect of a change for the better taking place, is it not time that my patience and my fortitude should become exhausted. Alas, I begin to grow weary of existence."

She covered her face with her hands as these words escaped her, and her tears flowed faster than ever.

Henry watched her with the most anxious and agitated looks. He could not deny the truth and force of her observations, and he knew not what to say in answer to them, and found it quite impossible for him even to attempt to offer her consolation.

His sister Amy found herself in the same painful situation, being entirely at a loss for words of comfort to offer the almost broken-hearted Phoebe, though anxious to do so.

A dismal silence of some few minutes ensued, which was only broken by the sobs and sighs of our heroine.

Henry Ashford abandoned himself to the most gloomy forebodings, which it would be found no easy task to conquer, and the afternoon passed drearily and tediously away, no one feeling at all disposed to enter into conversation.

Poor old Mark Mayfield, it was ascertained, although in a deplorable condition, was less excited than he had previously been, but required the constant attendance of the physician and the two keepers, and it seemed extremely doubtful as to what would be the result.

Phoebe heard this with that feeling of anguish which may be readily imagined; it was no more, however, than she had expected, and it seemed but to add to her despair.

At an earlier hour than usual Phoebe and Amy retired to their chamber, where they continued for some time engaged in conversation upon the melancholy event of the day, before they sought their bed.

CHAPTER CXLIII.

A QUARREL AMONGST THIEVES.

The whole of the gang of worthy gentlemen of the old haunt near the heath, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour to which they had kept up their debauch—greatly exhilarated as might be expected by the discovery which Dick Nibbles had made, and the artful manner in which he had fleeced the very knowing gentleman, Mr. Sam Filcher—assembled in the large room in which they generally sat, soon after daylight, anxious to bring this important and somewhat interesting event to a conclusion as soon as possible; though, of course they had already unanimously agreed amongst themselves to appropriate the greater portion of the ill-gotten money to their own use and benefit, and each of the villains was exulting in anticipation over the portion which would come to his share.

The whole of the money was spread upon the table round which the hardened ruffians were seated on the entrance of Sam Filcher and Beaufort, ushered in by Dick Nibbles and his companions; and they appeared to be in the highest spirits, and greeted Sam and his chapfallen associate vociferously, and with much mock cordiality.

Sam Filcher, however, immediately caught sight of the money on the table, and, with a half muttered oath, he was rushing forward with the mad idea of regaining possession of

it, when he was forcibly held back by Dick Nibbles and another of the thieves, the former of whom said, with an ironical and triumphant grin—

"Hold hard, Sam Filcher, my flower, you are not permitted to touch a single coin of that blunt until there's been a proper arrangement. That's what we've all agreed to, is it not?" he added, speaking to his lawless associates.

They unanimously replied in the affirmative.

"Now," returned Sam, with a savage look, "do you think I'm so precious green as to stand that?"

"You can't help yourself," replied Dick, "so you may as well take it coolly. What a fool you must be not to be more on your guard when you had such a large amount of property about you, and you knew the company you were in. But it's all in the way of business you know, Sam, it's all the way of business."

"Now yer don't mean to say positively," said Sam, "that yer means to try to stick to the whole lot?"

"Every farthing of it, I tell you again, except what comes to your share, and that of the worthy captain here, who looks rather down on his luck," replied Nibbles.

"Vot," exclaimed the enraged Sam Filcher, "fleece a feller with his eyes open? Rob yer own pal? Thief rob thief? Damme, if that here don't beat cock fighting, why my name's not Sam Filcher. But I won't stand it, I'll see yer all damned first."

"I tell you again you must," returned Dick Nibbles, "you can't help yourself, so what's the use of your putting yourself in a passion about it? Come, take your seat with your friend, the captain, at the table, and we'll soon get this little business out of hand."

"Give me the blunt," said Sam, in a hoarse voice; "I earnt it hard enuff, an' I'm not going to be done clean out of it in this here kind of way. If I do, I'm damned, so that here's all about it."

"What's the use of making yourself a fool, Sam Filcher?" said another of the ruffians, "you don't suppose that you can oppose us all, do you? So you may as well sit down and take it patiently. What's your friend, the captain say about it?"

"I've nothing more to say about it," replied Beaufort, sullenly, "than that I wish the confounded business was over."

Filcher fixed upon him a savage and threatening look, of which, however, Beaufort took but little heed, his thoughts being too busily occupied, and they then took their seats at the table, Sam having fairly exhausted all his stock of oaths, and finding that it was completely useless offering any

further opposition to the desperate wretches he had to deal with.

He cast a scowling and meaning look around upon the scoundrels, which had no other effect than to excite their utmost scorn and laughter, and Nibbles, who took upon himself the principal on the occasion, proceeded to commence the important business.

"I suppose, Sam," he remarked, "that you're pretty well acquainted with the amount there is, as you was taking great pains to count it last night when I discovered you?"

"An' damn yer for yer curiosity," said Sam, passionately; "there vos two hundred and forty pound in notes, an' goold, an' silver."

"Just the very sum, and a very tidy little haul to," said Dick.

"Vell, what next?" demanded Filcher, impatiently.

"Why, the next thing," returned Nibbles, "is to come to the sharing business, and that may be settled in the most agreeable manner in no time at all. Now there are just twenty of us, and what I propose is this, namely, that, taking it into consideration it was by your means it was obtained, you and the captain shall have the odd forty for your share between you."

"Very lib'ral," said Sam, with a sneer, but scarcely able to control his rage; "vell, proceed."

"Then I propose," continued Dick, "giving each of our pals here eight pounds each, which will amount to rather more than a hundred pounds, and if I keep the balance for my share, after all the trouble I have taken, I think I shall have acted very fair and very handsome."

Loud shouts of approbation followed this business like speech, and the proposal was moved, seconded, and carried unanimously.

"An' d'yer think as how old Sam Filcher is a going to allow himself to be chizzled in that manner," he exclaimed furiously, starting from his seat, and clenching his fist, "why, it's robbery."

"Why," returned Dick Nibbles, with a sarcastic laugh, "we know it's a robbery—a robbery of a robbery, and that's the beauty of it."

"Is it?"

"Yes; do you mean to take your share and the captain's for I know you're partners in everything?"

"If I do, may I be damned for a fool," replied Sam Filcher, foaming with rage, "I will have the whole or none."

"Then none will be your share," said Dick, "and there will be the more to share amongst myself and my companions. Thank you, old fellow, for your generosity."

"Do you mean to give me my blunt?"

"You have refused it."

"Every farden of the svag, I mean."

"No, it's not very likely."

"Then damn yer, I'll have it out of yer preshus bones," returned Sam Filcher, and at the same time he struck Dick Nibbles a tremendous blow on the head, which sent him senseless to the floor; then placed himself in the most approved and accomplished fighting attitude, quite ready and willing to accommodate any other gentleman who might seek a similar favour, at the same time he called upon the dismayed and trembling Beaufort to come up to the scratch to aid and assist, which he did with the greatest possible reluctance, and dreading the consequences of this rash proceeding.

The odds were rather great—some seven-teen to two—for Dick was lying stunned and powerless under the table, but Sam Filcher's mettle was up, as he said, and he felt nothing daunted, but more than a match for all of them; challenging them to come on, and take a taste of the quality of the Sprig of Myrtle.

The scene of confusion which now prevailed was almost inconceivable; in the first place there was a scramble for the money on the table, each one seizing what he could get hold of, and then a general attack was made on Sam Filcher and Beaufort.

If ever the Sprig of Myrtle had more particularly displayed his skill and courage, it must have been on that occasion; he stood firm as a rock, and fought like a lion, flooring his adversaries one after the other like skittle pins, and, with the feeble assistance of Beaufort only, keeping them all for some time at bay.

But it was not to be expected that this unequal contest could last long; Sam was nearly exhausted with his extraordinary exertions, and he and Beaufort being at length surrounded and secured, they were carried up stairs again to the room which they had before occupied, and once more made prisoners.

CHAPTER CXLIV.

UNPLEASANT REFLECTIONS.—THE ESCAPE.

As might have been expected, Sam and Beaufort were sadly maltreated, and their clothes were much torn and disordered.

Beaufort threw himself exhausted and spiritless on the bed; but Filcher, though disfigured by a pair of black eyes, and his features much swollen, was perfectly gay, for as he said, "he'd had 'sat, an' showed 'em vot old Sam Filcher vos made of."

He threw himself on a seat and paused to take breath, then after a short time said—

"Sharp vork that for the eyes, that here vos, an' not no mistake. I fancy I voke 'em up a bit, an' not no gammon. They didn't have all the best of it, an' no flies. The damned thieves! I hates myself to think I should ever have a disgraced myself by keeping sich comp'ny. Now, captain, rouse up, ye're arn't dead yet, though they've painted my ogles, an' rayther damaged my physiogermery. Vot d'yer think of it?"

"Why, that you're a headstrong fool," replied Beaufort, mustering all the courage he could, "and have got us both into a pretty dilemma with these fellows."

"So that's vot yer think of it?"

"Yes, and what I mean."

"Then, damn yer. D'yer think I vos a going to be robbed vithout rewenging it?"

"And what have you gained by it?" said Beaufort, with a sneer; "you've got well thrashed, excited the vengeance of those who hold us in their power, and have lost every farthing of your ill-gotten money."

"Hexcept a couple of ten pound notes which I picked up in the scramble," added Sam. "Vell I vos rayther fast, I own, I might as vell have taken the forty quid, and then have knocked as much more out on 'em as I could. Howsomdever I did show 'em my pluck, an' that's summat."

"Your pluck," repeated Beaufort, scornfully, "and what have you gained by that, I should like to know? Here these cursed scoundrels hold us prisoners, and can do as they like with us."

"Valker," returned Sam Filcher, "they von't though. Leave me alone for that here. They shall yet find the old Sprig of Myrtle more nor a match for 'em, an' not no mistake. But ye're a fool, captain, vith not no more pluck about yer than a tit-mouse. Yer alwus a grumbling, yer air; ye're not never satisfied, yer arn't: there's not no pleasing of yer, not no how."

"I am quite indifferent as to what you say now," retorted Beaufort, with a look of the most superlative contempt, "you seem to take all the pains you can to run your neck into the halter, and no doubt your clever endeavours will be ultimately and shortly crowned with success."

"Indeed? Is that here yer opinion?"

"It is my belief."

"Vell, there's von consolashun," said Sam, "that whenever I runs my preshus neck into the halter, as yer say, yer's vill go vith it, an' not no mistake, put that here into yer pipe an' smoke it, an' no doubt the reflexshun vill add much to yer comfort."

Beaufort shuddered, for he could not deny to himself the truth of the villain's observations.

"Curses light upon the hour when first I became acquainted with you," he said.

"Vell now," returned Sam, with a sarcastic look of reproach, "did ever any von hear sich base hingratitood as that here? Why vot 'ud become on yer long afore this here, if it hadn't been for me?—if it hadn't been for the kind care an' 'tenshun I've paid yer? Vhy, haven't I been more nor a father, sister or brother to yer? an' this here's the return yer makes for it, is it, yer ungrateful warmint. Bless'd if ever I does another good action as long as I live."

And the wounded feelings of the kind-hearted Mr. Sam Filcher found vent in a volley of oaths, which the reader will no doubt pardon us if we decline repeating.

"But varn't yer alwus a willain?" continued the indignant and exasperated Filcher at last, "a damned thief at heart, though a svelt in pocket? a sneaking, crafty, designing scoundrel, who would have cut a throat at any time if yer could gain anything by it, or could have found pluck enuff to do it. Can yer deny it? Answer me that here keveshtun if yer can."

Beaufort groaned, and covered his face with his hands, for his guilty conscience convinced him that every word which the ruffian had uttered in such coarse language was true and he shrunk appalled at the reflection.

"Oh, that here comes home to yer, does it?" said Sam; "yer don't half stomach it cos it's the truth, eh? P'raps I could tell yer a little more as yer wouldn't not 'sactly relish, but I von't jist now. So let's have not no more of yer preaching an' ranting vill yer, cos it von't fit. Yer'd been sure to have comed to the gallows some time or other, whether yer'd knowd me or not."

"Forbear Sam," supplicated the wretched Beaufort, with a look of horror.

"An' so yer would," persisted Filcher, "an' yer know it; 'yer'd done enuff to entitle yer to the gallows long afore yer an' I become hintymate."

Beaufort again groaned, for every word that the exulting villain spoke was agony to him.

"Oh," remarked Sam, with a sarcastic grin, "so that here bit of good truth seems to stick in yer gizzard. Yer don't half like it, eh? Vell, I can't help it. Yer'll hâve to svaaller it vwhether yer likes it or not."

"Taunting devil," exclaimed Beaufort, with a look of hatred and disgust, "you seem to take a delight to torture me."

"In course I does, when yer haggerawates me to it," returned Sam.

"I cannot but reproach you for your wanton and reckless cruelty," said Beaufort, "what necessity was there for the last frightful crime you committed? Could you not have been satisfied with the booty you had obtained? And what good has that done

you? I told you a terrible curse would pursue you for that awful night's work, and my predictions will be realised, depend upon it."

"There, shut up, vill yer," said Sam, impatiently, and with an angry look, "I vant none of yer damned prophecies, though I don't believe a vord on 'em."

And think you that the ruffians below will not have revenge for the useless resistance offered to them?" interrogated Beaufort.

"That for their rewenge," replied Sam, snapping his finger and thumb together contemptuously; "I defies'em."

"You may affect to do so," observed Beaufort, "but it's all useless. We are their prisoners and they will do as they like with us."

"Gammon."

"We can't help ourselves."

"Vell see about that here; let'em dare to detain us, that here's all."

"What can we offer in opposition to numbers?" demanded Beaufort.

"Damn their numbers," replied the gallant Sam, "vot do I care for 'em? They shan't best me, if I know it."

"And supposing we should be allowed to go about our business," remarked Beaufort, "where can we hide ourselves from the pursuit of justice? Our looks, especially after this affray would betray us."

"Not they."

"They would be sure to do so."

"Vell, ve must chance it, vwhether or no, so it's no use a funkung about it. I don't half like the hidea of being caged up in this here manner, an' I must have some explanation about it. So here goes."

He advanced hastily to the room-door as he thus spoke, and kicked loudly against it."

"Hollo, there, yer damned scamps," he exclaimed at the top of his voice, "is this the way yer sarves two respectable gemmen, and be damned to yer? Open the door, or it vill be vorse for yer."

Beaufort trembled, and would fain have dissuaded his hardened and reckless companion to desist, but he knew that would be useless, so he did not attempt to do so.

"I'll vake 'em up," said Sam, repeating his kicking at the door, with redoubled violence, "I'll vake 'em up if possible, an' no mistake. Hollo, yer damned scoundrels, d'yer hear? Yer must be deaf or dead if yer don't. I only vish I could burst this preshus door open, that's all, I'd let 'em see."

What he proposed to let them see, we cannot undertake to say, but the ruffians, even if they heard what he said, did not seem disposed to afford him the opportunity of gratifying his wishes, and Sam, enraged beyond measure, again poured forth a volley of the most fearful oaths and execrations, while Beaufort remained silent but trembling



with fear, lest the villains should indeed make their appearance.

"Vell," observed Sam, reseating himself, tired of his useless exertions, "they've got the pull of it this time, anyhow; but they shan't have it long."

"You may as well remain quiet, and wait patiently," said Beaufort, "or you may only serve to enrage them the more, and we might both have cause to rue the consequences."

"Hold yer tongue, vill yer?" returned Sam, in surly tones; "I don't vant none of yer hadwice. Ye're alwus a putting yer spoke in vithout it's being ax't for. These here damned scoundrels shall yet find that they're not got no kittin to play vith in Sam Filcher."

He arose from his seat, and was about to resume his kicking at the door, when the

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loud laughter of the wretches below prevented him.

"So ye're making merry about it, air yer, my flowers?" said Filcher, "laughing at the manner in which yer've fleeced us, an' the vay in which yer've caged us, eh? All right, my rumuns, have yer full swing out, I'll be von vith yer by-an-by, an' not no mistake."

"Your threats are idle Sam," returned Beaufort, "and you must inwardly admit them to be so."

"But I don't, an' I repeats 'em," said Sam Filcher.

"What nonsense, are we not completely powerless?"

"No, 'tis only yer cowardly fears that makes yer fancy so. They dare not detain us, I say ag'in—they'll be glad to get rid on us at any price."

"Which they will doubtless do by putting us fairly in the hands of the officers of justice," said Beaufort.

"Vot, an' betray themselves, which they must do," returned Sam; "psha, yer get a vorse fool every hour. Why, how could they split upon us without a convicting of themselves, an' they're not keville green enuff for that here."

"It is a cursed unfortunate piece of business altogether," said Beaufort, "and I wish we were well out of it."

"It's a damned infortunate thing as we've lost that preshus svag," observed Filcher, in a doleful tone; "as for getting out of the business, leave that here to me, an' ve shall be right enuff."

"And if we escape from here?"

"Vell?"

"Where can we direct our footsteps for safety?"

"Towards London ag'in, an' chance it," replied Sam, "we shall be safe enuff there for awhile, laid up in lawender in some of the back slums. In a month or so we can kim out ag'in as fresh as daisies, an' vonce more try our luck in fortin's wheel."

"Should we not be detected before," remarked Beaufort.

"There ye're at it ag'in, funkung air yer?" ejaculated Sam, in an angry voice; "ye're sich a preshus cur I shall never be able to make not nuffin of yer."

"Bah," returned Beaufort, with a look of the most utter contempt, "your pretended recklessness is mere braggadocio; you cannot deceive me with all your cunning. You may bounce and swagger for awhile, but let the real moment of danger arrive, and I'll warrant that you will show yourself to be the verriest coward that ever existed."

Sam Filcher gave a short whistle at the end of this speech, and looked at Beaufort for a moment or two with surprise and in silence, for he was not at all prepared to hear such words escape his lips, and some of the observations hit him rather to sharply.

"I say, old feller," he at length remarked, "ye're a kimmin out a little bit, an't yer? Yer may jist as vell draw it a little bit mild though, if yer please, cos yer see, I'm not altogether in the humour to bear it, an' yer an' I might 'appen to fall out, which wouldn't not be to the hadwantage of nayther of us."

"You are not over particular with me," retorted Beaufort, boldly, and fixing upon the more astonished Sam Filcher a look of defiance, "and hitherto I have been fool enough to submit to it, because I did not wish to have any words with you, but I shall no longer continue to do so, so look to it."

"Vot," exclaimed Sam Filcher, with a

mingled look of surprise and rage, "do yer dare to threaten?"

"I dare to warn yer that I will no longer submit to your bullying," returned Beaufort, firmly, "and to threaten too, if you persist."

Sam stared with perfect amazement, and could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

"Vell, I never," he said at last, "here's a start. So yer have got some pluck left in yer, has yer? Vell, bless'd if I don't like yer all the better for that here. Only yer continny in this here humour, an' I shan't have a vord to say ag'in to yer."

Beaufort fixed upon him another look of scorn and defiance, but said not a word in reply; and Sam finding that he was not inclined for conversation, was compelled to abandon himself to his own reflections.

Some time longer elapsed in this manner, and still no one appeared, though the voices of the ruffians below were heard at intervals engaged in boisterous mirth and revelry, much to the annoyance of Mr. Sam Filcher, who indulged in a great variety of oaths, and passed several observations upon the persons below, that were anything but complimentary or flattering to those gentlemen.

Having again kicked his hardest and bawled his loudest at the door to no purpose, he returned to his seat, and once more resigning himself to his fate, commenced singing with much spirit, and greatly to his own amusement and satisfaction.

Having run through the principal of his favourite ballads with his usual ability, he began whistling, and this he continued till he was fairly exhausted for want of breath.

"There," he said, when he had concluded, "that's the way to keep yer pecker up when ye're under difficulties, eh, captain? They don't seem inclined to honour us with their comp'ny, an' I'm sure I shall not break my heart about it. They might as vell have left us some grub though, for I feels devilish peckish,, don't you captain?"

"No," replied Beaufort, "I've something else to think about than eating."

"Have yer?" said Sam, "vell, for my own part I can eat an' think at the same time, an' that here's ever so much better to my fancy. Vot d'yer think of it now?"

"Why," answered Beaufort, "that the sooner we leave this cursed place the better."

"Vell," said Sam, "bless'd if I don't beggin to be of the same opinion. But that here's easier said than done."

"It can be effected without any difficulty," said Beaufort.

"How so?"

Beaufort pointed significantly to the window.

"Ah," cried Sam, "the vinder, by which yer vos going to make yer escape, when I

cotched yer. I didn't think of that. I vonder whether they're fastened it though, while ve vos below.

He went to the window and tried it as he thus spoke.

"All right," he said, "it's not fastened, so ve can easily step on to the roof of the shed underneath, and then to jump from there to the ground vill be nuffin. Come, captain, taking of all the circumstances into consideration, I think ve may as vell step it at vonce."

"No," said Beaufort.

"Why not?"

"Because it would be fraught with danger in the daytime, and while these ruffians are about," answered Beaufort; "we had better wait till dark, when we may depart unobserved and in safety."

"Right ag'in, captain," said Sam Filcher, approvingly, "yer gives wery good hadvice this here time, an' no mistake, an' I gives yer credit for it. To-night then ve makes off hexit, an' vonce more trusts to fortin. It's a no use a staying here for 'em to have the grin on us. But, I say captain, ve're not a going to leave 'em in this here keviet manner altogether, air ve?"

"What do you mean?"

"Shall we not be rewenged?"

"No; be satisfied to make your escape. Any attempt at vengeance on those desperate and determined scoundrels would be only certain to recoil upon ourselves."

"I don't see it," said Sam, with a dissatisfied look, "it's a damned shame that they should have it all their own vay, an' that ve should make no return for the vay they've sarved us. I should jist like to give 'em sich a varming as that here at the farm, an' I could do it easily too."

"Hold," exclaimed Beaufort, peremptorily, "I will not listen to such a villanous proposition, and which would be sure to result in our own detection, and precipitate our fate."

"Vell, as yer like," returned Sam, submissively, "though I think it's a pity to lose so excellent a hoppershuns. It'll soon be dark, an' then ve tips 'em the go-by."

"And do you know of any place, some distance from here, where we can put up in safety for the night," eagerly inquired Beaufort.

"Oh, leave that here to me," replied Sam, "I'll find a hot-ell, never fear. Ve needn't be afear'd that these here fellers vill take the trouble to pursue us. I vish I hadn't got this here pair of stinkers though, they does not look wery 'spectable."

"True," coincided Beaufort, "and our appearance altogether is very well calculated to excite suspicion."

"Ve must cheek it out; yer'll be careful how yer act, captain?" said Sam.

"Look to yourself, and leave me to act as I please," replied Beaufort.

"Not so 'sactly, my flower," said Sam, "that von't do, yer may hact as yer please so long as yer only hact proper, an' as I please. Howsomdever, ve'll have no more words about that here. Let's be off, an' ve can talk about vot ve're going to do an' the vay to do it arterwards."

To this Beaufort agreed, and they conversed but little for the remainder of the day, both waiting anxiously the arrival of night.

CHAPTER CXLV.

THE FLIGHT OF SAM FILCHER AND BEAUFORT.

"It's lucky that I secured a couple of pistols in the scuffle," remarked Sam, producing them, and also a formidable-looking long-bladed clasp knife, "I might have occasion to make use of 'em, an' I shall not forget to do so, if I'm pushed to it."

Beaufort believed him, for he had good reason to do so, but he made no remark, and silence again ensued.

At length darkness, so long looked anxiously for by Sam Filcher and his companion, enveloped the earth, and the noise of the villains below had ceased, and from the profound silence that prevailed, it seemed as if they had either retired to rest or had left the house.

"Now for it, captain," said Sam, suddenly rising from his seat, "the time's come at last, an' all's keviet. All's right, now to commence hoppershuns."

"And let that be done as silently and cautiously as possible," said Beaufort, "for there is no knowing but there may be listeners."

"Never fear, captain," returned Sam, "ve shall be sure to succeed, take my vord for it, and a few minutes vill settle the b'sness. Let's first see that the coast is keвите clear though."

He went to the window, followed by Beaufort, as he spoke, and cautiously raising it, they both looked out.

No person, however, was to be seen, and everything seemed to favour their designs.

"There's no von about, an' that's lucky," observed Sam.

He then went to the door and listened, but all remained perfectly silent, and it seemed as if a more fitting opportunity for the execution of their plans could not have presented itself.

Sam returned to the window.

"Here goes," he said, putting one leg over the sill; "foller me closely, captain."

Putting his other leg over the window sill,

Sam dropped easily on to the roof of the shed or out-house, Beaufort anxiously watching him, before he ventured to follow himself.

The next moment Filcher sprang from the roof, and alighted on the ground in safety.

But scarcely had he done so, than Beaufort, as he eagerly looked through the darkness, beheld the form of a man steal cautiously from the shed, and approach Sam, who, however, happened to turn suddenly round and beholding him, sprang quickly upon him, and grasped him fiercely by the throat with one hand, while with the other he drew his murderous knife, and plunged it to the handle in the wretched man's breast, who sank without a groan to the earth a corpse.

That man was Dick Nibbles, and thus the villain Sam Filcher had the opportunity of gratifying his revenge when he least expected it.

So sudden was this awful event that Beaufort could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses, and remained gazing from the window with stupified horror and confusion.

The half stifled voice of Sam Filcher, however, immediately beneath the window aroused him.

"Quick, quick, captain," he said, "or all will be up. Vot the devil air yer skulking for?"

Beaufort hesitated not an instant longer, but dropping from the window-sill on to the roof, quickly alighted on the ground by Sam's side.

He cast one hasty and fearful glance at the ghastly corpse of the guilty man who had fallen so suddenly beneath the ready hand of Sam Filcher, and shuddered to think of this addition to the dark catalogue of their crimes.

But Sam did not give him much time there to reflect, for grasping his arm, and hurrying him away from the spot, he said—

"Come along, captain, ve must run for it, for should the gang discover the dead body of Nibbles they'd have their rewenge on us, an' no mistake."

Beaufort knew this well enough, without Sam being at the trouble to tell him, but he returned no answer, his fears being increased by seeing lights moving about in the old house, and they ran at the top of their speed, till turning an abrupt corner, and entering upon a long, dark, and dreary lane, where they, of course, lost sight of the house.

They continued their flight to some distance along this lane, till they were compelled to pause to take breath, and the more especially as there seemed to be not the least danger of pursuit.

"Vell, ve've give 'em the slip, anyhow," said Sam, "an' verry cleverly too. I say, captain, I think I've been von vith Dick Nibbles, eh? It's a settled case vith him, an' not no mistake."

"More bloodshed," said Beaufort, with a shudder of horror, "when will there be an end of it?"

"Can't say," replied Sam, in his usual careless manner, "but it vos no fault of mine as Nibbles lost his life; he shouldn't have thrown himself in my way. He meant a having my life, only I happened to be too sharp upon him. Yer can't deny the truth of that here, captain."

Beaufort certainly could not, and he replied accordingly.

"Besides," said the hardened Sam, "I did the thing so kevietly that none of the other fellows were alarmed, an' ve've been able to escape vithout any bother."

"Let us begone, Sam," urged Beaufort, "we are not safe a moment while we remain here."

"Oh, ve're right enuff," returned Sam, "so yer've no occasion to put yerself in a fever. It's a chance, since I settled Dick, if the gang vill know anything of our escape till the morning, an' ve shall be far enuff off by then."

"Whither are we going?" interrogated Beaufort.

"Ax no keveshtuns, but leave ewerything to me," answered Sam, "I know what I'm about, an' yer all right if yer only does as I vish."

Beaufort was obliged to humour Filcher, and to appear satisfied, though he was far from being so, and they again resumed their way along the lane, which appeared to be almost interminable, and was so dark that it was impossible to distinguish anything at the shortest distance from you.

Beaufort—notwithstanding that he was satisfied that they had managed to escape from the den of infamy where they were surrounded with so much danger—felt truly wretched, when he reflected upon the dismal prospect that was before him and his guilty companion, and he could not help thinking that their long career of crime was fast drawing to a close, and he trembled with horror when he reflected upon the ignominious fate that most assuredly awaited two such wretches as themselves.

He would likewise have wished that Sam Filcher had been rather more communicative as to the place of destination, though he knew not why he should entertain any doubts or fears upon the subject.

But in spite of all his efforts to banish it from his memory, the ghastly corpse of Dick continued to haunt Beaufort's imagination, and to add to the fears and misgivings that

tortured his brain; for guilty even as the ruffian was, he could not help feeling some degree of pity for his untimely fate.

"It would have been better could that fearful deed have been avoided," he involuntarily uttered aloud.

"Vot's the matter now?" demanded Sam, hastily, and fixing upon Beaufort a searching look; "vot air yer grumbling about?"

"I repeat," answered Beaufort, "that it is a pity that murder could not be avoided."

"Murder, d'yer call it?" returned Sam, "vell, I don't; whose fault vos it? Who vos to blame? Not I; he sought my life, an' I only hacted in self-defence. Besides, if I hadn't been so sharp upon him, an' done the b'sness so cleverly, he vould have alarmed his pals, that here's kevite sartin, an' vhere shoud've have been then, I should like to know?"

Those were facts which could not very well be controverted, even if he had felt inclined to attempt to do so.

"Crime succeeds crime so rapidly," he remarked, "that my very heart sickens, and my blood runs chill at the thought."

"Psha," returned Sam, with a look of impatience, "vot preshuns pains yer take, captain, to make yer life miserable. I vouldn't be sich a moloncholy feller as yer air for the world. Come rouse up, vill yer, an' jist try to banish them here dismal thoughts from yer brain. Yer ought to feel satisfied to think that ve've succeeded in making our escape from that infernal crib. I vonder if Dick Nibbles had any of the blunt he took from me about him, at the time I settled his b'sness. I shouldn't vonder but he had, an' I'm only sorry I vos in sich a hurry, an' didn't stop to search him."

"And by so doing," rejoined Beaufort, "have given the villains time to discover us, and to wreak their vengeance on our heads. Be satisfied that we have succeeded so far in our designs."

"Vell," answered Sam, "I suppose I must, for it's no use a grumbling about it. A few quid in addishun to vot ve've got vould have been handy though. Never mind, it can't be helped, so kim along, captain?"

"Has this confounded dark lane got no end?" interrogated Beaufort, who notwithstanding the apparent absense of danger, began to grow impatient of the dreary scene.

"Yes," answered Sam Filcher, "about two miles farder on, I believe. It's a pleasant place, isn't it?"

"Where does it lead to?" asked Beaufort.

"To the Elm wood, as they calls it," replied Sam, "vhich is a shade or two more dismal than this here place."

"Can't we avoid the wood, and proceed by some other and more agreeable route?" said Beaufort.

"No."

"Then we may make up our minds to be wandering about all night," observed Beaufort, "for it's not likely that we can meet with any place of accommodation by the way you propose."

"There, don't alarm yerself, captain," returned Filcher, "I'll see all about that here; I'll make it all right for my own sake, yer may make sure of that."

Beaufort said no more, and they continued to traverse the lane for some distance farther, when Beaufort suddenly stopped, and looked anxiously and fearfully back, at least, as well as his eyes could penetrate through the darkness.

"How now; vot alarms yer?" demanded Sam, hastily.

"I should think you have no occasion to ask that question, if you are not deaf," replied Beaufort, "for you must hear the hasty sound of horses approaching along the lane."

"Vell," said Sam, "that is true, sure enuff. They might be enemies, an' they mightn't, but it's kevite as vell not to chance it. It's no use proceeding, cos they'll be upon us in a minute. S'pose ve climb up into von of these tall trees, captain, till they've passed."

This suggestion was immediately adopted, and Filcher and Beaufort ascended the tree with much agility, and concealed themselves among the thick branches, but in such a manner that they could observe all that passed beneath.

They were not kept long in suspense, the riders quickly approached, and Sam and his companion immediately saw from their dress, and two or three observations that fell from one of them, that they were three of the horse-patrol, and that they were evidently in pursuit of some one, which the ready fears of Beaufort instantly conjectured to be himself and Sam Filcher.

He had every reason to congratulate himself, however, that they had availed themselves of Sam's prudent suggestion, for there was no fear of their being discovered where they were, and the men quickly disappeared, and the sound of their horses' hoofs died away in the distance.

"So much for that here little adventure," remarked Sam, "ve're right enuff now, an' may venture on our vay."

To this Beaufort agreed, and descending the tree they resumed their flight with considerable more confidence.

CHAPTER CXLIV.

SAM AND BEAUFORT PURSUE THEIR JOURNEY.

"This cursed lane," at length impatiently

observed Beaufort, "certainly cannot have an end."

"Patience, patience, captain," replied Sam, "ye shall get to it some time or other, never fear. It could not have been lucky for us if those here horse-patrol had seen us. I wonder now who they're looking arter."

"Our worthy selves, no doubt," replied Beaufort, with a half sarcastic look.

"Psha," ejaculated Sam, "yer alwus fancy the worst; 'vhy should they want us more than anybody else?"

"Because we're two of the greatest scoundrels now at large."

"That here's highly flattering, an' not no mistake."

"'Tis no more than we deserve," said Beaufort, "and you can't deny it. Besides, the body of the murdered man has probably been discovered, and these officers sent in pursuit of us."

"Nonsense," said Sam Filcher, with a look of contempt, "yer talk like a man without a head. Is it likely that the gang would say anything about the death of their pal, an' thus betray themselves? These here patrols no doubt air on some other tack, an' arter some other victims. At any rate they are far enuff off by this here time, an' if ve throws ourselves in their vay, an' let's 'em grab us, vhy, it'll be our own fault, that's all I've got to say about it."

There was a good deal of reason in the observations of Sam Filcher, and Beaufort did not therefore attempt to contradict him, and they pursued their tedious way along that apparently interminable lane.

The lane, as we think has been before observed, was exceedingly narrow and tortuous in many parts, and being overshadowed by tall trees growing on either side, completely excluded every particle of light, and thus rendered the effect of the gloom doubly solemn and impressive.

Beaufort cursed it in his heart, but if it had any unpleasant effect upon Sam Filcher he certainly did not display it, and, in spite of the suggestions of his companion, that it was acting with the greatest imprudence under the circumstances, he sung till he was tired, and that too at the top of his voice, and as usual finished with a performance that might have rivalled any German siffleur that ever "cocked a lip."

At last they did reach the extremity of the lane, without encountering any one on the way, and they now found themselves in a small open space, from either side of which a road, or rather pathway, diverged, while the dark elm-wood frowned in front of them.

The aspect of the scene was by no means cheering, and Beaufort again experienced the most dismal fears, doubts, and misgivings, which he could not, and did not attempt

to conceal from Filcher, who, as might be expected, marked them with the greatest contempt.

"Now, captain," he said, "vot air yer looking so preshus miserable about? Yer don't seem to like the prospect afore yer."

"I must possess a strange taste if I did," replied Beaufort, "it is one of the gloomiest that I ever clapped eyes upon."

"Vell," observed Filcher, "I didn't deceive yer, yer know. I told yer it vos a shade or two more dismal than the lane ve just quitted, an' now yer can judge for yerself."

"Had we not better avoid the wood, and take one of these roads or pathways?" interrogated Beaufort, eagerly.

"No," answered Sam, "we can't not do no sich thing, for that here would spile all my 'rangements. There now, don't be a frightening yerself to death. Blest if yer don't get vorse ewery minute. Kim along, ve must find our vay in the best manner ve can."

"We are sure to become lost and bewildered in the intricate mazes of this wood," remarked Beaufort, "and I see clearly that we shall have to make up our minds to wander about all night."

"Not if I knows it, ve shan't," said Sam, "but if ve do ve can't help it. Yer wanted us to go the most dreary vay, didn't yer? Where ve vos not likely to meet with anybody? so I choosed this here. Ve might have gone across the heath, but then ye're afeared of that here place. Besides, s'posing any von had gone in pursuit on us, there vosn't not no place where ve could have concealed ourselves."

"There is some truth in that," observed Beaufort.

"In course there is; so make yer mind easy, an' say no more about it," said Sam.

"Is this wood of any great extent?"

"Vhy, I can't say disactly; it's so long ago, aye, twenty years since I crossed it, that I forgets. But it's no use standing here talking, that vou't mend the matter. So kim along, captain."

Beaufort cast another timid glance towards the wood and hesitated; but Sam, whose patience was evidently exhausted, laid hold of his arm and hurried him forward, and they passed through a small opening between the trees into the dreary place.

Nothing could possibly be more frightful than the aspect of all around; the darkness was most intense, and the trees grew up thick and clustering together, that it seemed to be almost impossible for any one to force their way. It was indeed a fit place for the perpetration of any deed of darkness, and a shuddering sensation stole through the frame of Beaufort which he found it impossible to

resist, although he tried all in his power to do so.

Sam Filcher continued to grasp him by the wrist, forcing him on through the almost insurmountable difficulties by which they were surrounded, as well as he could, and endeavouring to raise his spirits at the same time by several observations peculiar to himself. Beaufort, however, became more timid at every step he took, and the horror of the scene conjured up the most dismal and torturing thoughts in his brain.

The wind moaned at intervals through the forest, and amidst the thickly clustering foliage, and it often startled Beaufort, who could almost imagine that he heard the voices of troubled spirits in the blast, and he even feared to look around him.

The farther they proceeded the more the darkness seemed to increase, and fresh difficulties met them at every turn.

"Rayther pleasant trav'ling this," remarked Sam; "a lantern would be very handy though, blest if I can see my preshus hand afore me."

"It is no use, we may as well return; it is quite impossible for us to be ever able to penetrate this cursed place," said Beaufort, in despair.

"Vot's the use of talking in that here manner? ve must; so yer may as vell make up yer mind to it at vonce, without any more grumbling. As for returning, that here's all stuff. Let me keep close hold on yer, for if ve happens to get parted an' to miss each other it's all u p, ve should never find ourselves ag'in. Kim along, put a stout heart on the b'sness, captain, and ve shall get through it never fear."

The encouraging observations of Filcher failed to have the desired effect on Beaufort, and he proceeded with fear and trembling, allowing Sam, however, to retain a tight hold of his wrist, lest they should as he had said, become separated.

The wind still howled dismally among the foliage, and sounded fearfully in the ears of the alarmed Beaufort, whose mind was so excited that his disordered imagination presented to him all kinds of appalling ideas, and he really at that time, possessed no more courage than a child, much to the cnotempt of his ruffian companion, who indulged in frequent ironical remarks upon the same, which were in no way calculated to calm the agitated feelings of the former.

At length, with much difficulty they groped their way into a more disentangled part of the forest, and could proceed with something like ease, a fact which Sam congratulated himself and Beaufort sincerely upon, and he said—

"There ve air all right now, ve can go along like von o'clock; I told yer as how it

vos no use a being down-hearted, for ve should be able to overcome all difficulties in no time at all.

"This is a little better to be sure, but we have not much cause to congratulate ourselves upon the prospect before us. We had almost better have remained at the old house and taken our chance."

"Did ever any von hear sich a feller? why the man's a perfect fool. Vosn't yer the first to propose our escaping from the crib, cos yer fancied all sorts of dangers threatened us?"

"True; but I never expected that we should have had to encounter such difficulties as we are now doing," replied Beaufort.

"Psha, yer alwus make sich a preshus fuss about trifles. Yer can't expect to have it all yer own way," returned Filcher.

"Hold! what was that?" suddenly exclaimed Beaufort, starting.

"Vot vos vot?"

"Yonder."

"Vell, vot of yonder?—I sees nuffin but the trees."

"I saw a pale light," said Beaufort, which seemed to rise out of the earth, but it's gone now."

"Nonsense, 'tvas all fancy, or else it vos a vill-o'-the-visp, as they calls it. I only vish there vos a light, jist to show us on our vay, that's all."

"Ah, again," ejaculated Beaufort, trembling, and grasping the arm of Sam Filcher; "and I could swear that I saw a shadowy form."

"Vot air yer aiming at now?" sternly demanded Sam, with an oath; "air yer trying to frighten me as vell as yerself? cos if yer air, yer'll find it no go."

"Sam, Sam," exclaimed the terrified man, in a tremulous voice, and still clutching his companion's arm, "look, look, there she stands again, the ghastly shade of the murdered gipsy sybil! and see another grim form now appears standing beside her; 'tis that of your last victim, oh, horror!"

Sam in spite of his pretended courage and scepticism, could not help looking in the direction which Beaufort indicated, and either his imagination had been wrought upon by the fears and observations of his trembling companion, or he certainly beheld the shadowy forms of the late gipsy sibil and Dick, surrounded by a supernatural light, and with their pale and ghastly features fixed upon him.

But it was only for an instant, and whether or not it was merely a delusion of the disordered senses, all faded from the sight of Filcher, and he quickly recovered himself, and even affected to laugh at what he called his stupid imagination.

Beaufort had covered his face with his

hands, in order to shut out the ghastly objects which had so appalled his sight, but hearing the coarse laughter of Filcher, he ventured to look up, and then beheld that the objects of his terror had disappeared, and that all was again involved in complete darkness.

The coarse levity of the hardened scoundrel—although he could not help thinking that it was half assumed—shocked and terrified him, for he felt as certain that what he had seen was no mere creation of the affrighted and disordered imagination as that he still breathed.

"Filcher, Filcher," he exclaimed, laying his hand upon his arm, and looking into his face with an expression of the most unmitigated horror and disgust, "forbear, on your life forbear; have you no sense of decency left in that callous breast of your's? Does not your guilty conscience upbraid you when even the spirits of the dead—the ghastly phantoms of your murdered victims, rise up to appal you with their awful presence?"

"There, shut up, vill yer?" returned Sam, again laughing, though it would have been easy to perceive that it was forced; "yer want to make me as great a old 'oman as yerself, but it won't do. It vos all fancy, I tell yer ag'in, I seed nuffin, it vosn't likely, though yer croaking, an' quaking, an' trembling vos enuff to make any von s'pose that they did. Let's have no more of this nonsense about ghosts an' hobbergoberlins, for I'm sick of it. Yer head, that here preshus head of yourn is full of nuffin else but 'em, I do believe."

"You are a hardened villain, Filcher," said Beaufort, again fixing upon him a look of disgust, "but the time will come when you will be brought to your senses."

"I wish the time vos come when yer vos brought to yourn," retorted Sam, "for jist now yer the damndest fool that ever I heerd speak, an' the greatest cur into the bargain. But I'm not a going to stand here listening to yer nonsense. I don't want to vander in this here not wery lively place for a month, if it suits yer fancy to do so. Kim along, vill yer? an' keep close to me ag'in if yer don't want to lose yerself."

Beaufort still trembled, and looked timidly towards the spot where he imagined he had seen those ghastly objects that had so appalled him, but he feared, and neither did he think it worth while, to make any further observations to the insensible Sam Filcher, and suffering him to take his arm, they once more proceeded slowly, but with much less difficulty than before on their dreary way.

How Beaufort shuddered as they passed the place where he was certain but a minute or two before he had seen the grim forms of the murdered, and beheld their hollow and

filmy eyes fixed upon himself and Filcher, but the latter, whether he felt it or not, exhibited not the least signs of fear or emotion, but, on the contrary, hummed the burthen of a flash song, much to the terror and disgust of his companion.

The way was now more clear, less entangled and intricate, and the wanderers were enabled to proceed with comparative ease, although the prospect before them was still anything but a cheerful one, and Beaufort frequently paused and trembled, as he imagined he heard the murmuring of voices in the pauses of the wind, and saw human forms lurking stealthily about in the obscurity before them.

Every time he did so, he was sure to meet with a volley of oaths from the impatient Sam Filcher, who continued to mock his fears, and to taunt him with his cowardice, and which the unhappy Beaufort was compelled to endure with the best grace he could, for he knew well that any retort he might make would only provoke fresh annoyance and abuse.

"Blest if yer arn't frightened at yer own shadder," remarked Sam, "an' there can't be the old trunk of a tree a head, a stretching it's branches out like a couple of arms, but yer takes it to be a man or a ghost. I never seed sich a cowardly feller in my life."

"And is not this dismal place enough to try any one's courage?" demanded Beaufort.

"No," replied Sam, contemptuously, "unless it 'appens to be sich another preshus old 'oman as yerself. I shall never be able to make nuffin of yer. I can see. Yer needn't fear that yer vill meet with any von in this here vood but poor devils like ourselves whom accident compels to enter it. Besides it's light enuff now to see our vay, an ve can get on like von o'clock. Kim along, captain, ve shall be all right enuff by-an-by."

Beaufort did endeavour to arouse himself, for he found it was no good to give way to the feelings which had hitherto agitated him, and he followed Sam without saying another word.

As Sam had said, too, there was a considerable portion of light now admitted between the branches of the trees that formed a canopy over their heads, consequently the dreariness of the place was in a measure abated.

Sam proceeded with the greatest confidence, stating that now he could see his way a little clearer, he knew every inch of the ground, and that they would soon find themselves "snug enuff."

"Ah," he observed, "vell do I know this old vood, many a long day ago, when times vos better than they is now, an' there vos plenty of rowdy to be made vithout much trouble of seeking for it. I've done some



b'sness here twenty years ago, I can tell yer; many a bright guinea have I nailed, though I'm sorry to say that von or two others have been topped for vot I did. That vos wery hard for 'em, poor fellows, but I couldn't help it, yer know."

Beaufort shuddered, and looked at him with a feeling of horror.

"And do you not tremble, Filcher," he said, "to be traversing the dismal scene of some of your former crimes?"

"Not I," returned the villain, carelessly, "I'm not a chap of that here sort of kidney, an' yer ought to know that. I only vishes the times vos as good now as they vos then, that would be summat like, but there's no sich thing as a getting a honest living now."

The reckless scoundrel uttered the last words in a deep tone of sorrow and lamenta-

tion, and evidently considered himself a complete martyr to the hardness of the times.

Beaufort viewed him with increased disgust, but Sam Filcher took no notice of it, and if he had no doubt would have treated it with the utmost indifference.

"I vonder how the vorthy hindywidwals at the old house feels themselves now," he remarked, after a pause; "they've diskivered our escape, I dare say, an' the body of Dick Nibbles, an' a rare vay they'll be in about it I shouldn't vonder. Vell, ve've bested them this here round, an' no mistake."

"We had better not make too sure of that," returned Beaufort, "but be on our guard and act with caution, lest they should seize the opportunity of seeking revenge when we least expect it, or are prepared to meet it."

"Psha," said Sam Filcher, "there's no fear of that here, only yer alwus a getting some out of the vay noshuns or other into that here preshus nob of yourn. They're too deep in the mire, an' yer knows it, to allow them to make any noise about us, an' ve're right enuff, as I said afore, if ve only hacts vith caution."

"That I'm prepared to do," observed Beaufort, "for it would be sheer madness to rush headstrong into danger. Is this forest of much farther extent, Sam?"

"Yes," replied the latter, "an' ve shall scarcely be able to reach the end of it, if ve walks our hardest for a couple of hours, which ve shant be very vell able to do in sich a place as this here. Howsomdever, ve must make the best of it—it's not no use a dropping down on our luck upon it."

This was not very encouraging news for Beaufort to hear, but he stifled the expression of his feelings, and again followed his companion on their way.

In spite of all that Sam had said, however, the termination of the wood, and consequently their tedious journey, seemed to be as remote as ever, and they soon again became lost and bewildered in its intricate mazes, and without any probability of their being able to extricate themselves for some time.

The patience of Beaufort was quite exhausted, and that of Sam Filcher appeared to be in much about the same condition, for he gave utterance to a volley of oaths that would greatly have shocked ears polite.

"Well," said Beaufort, coming to a sudden stand-still, and his companion doing the same, "this is a most agreeable journey, I must say, and a very pleasant prospect we have before us too. We may as well make up our minds to stop here for the night, for we seem to be as far off getting to the end of this confounded wood as we were the first moment we entered it."

"Damn it," said Filcher, "vot must I have been about? Blessed if I arn't mistaken the vay, an' knows no more which vay to turn than a preshus babby."

"I thought you said when we came to the more open part of the wood that you knew every inch of the ground?" observed Beaufort.

"So I did," returned Sam, "but I've made a mistake somehow or t'other, an' now I feels myself all in a fog-like. It's all yer fault."

"How so?"

"Vhy yer vould keep on bothering an' bewildering my preshus brain vith yer idle fears an' yer nonsense; the konsekense is that yer put me out of my reck'ning, an' made me commit this here blunder."

"Of course, I must always have to bear

the blame for everything," said Beaufort, sullenly.

"Sartinly," replied Sam, "because yer deserves it. A pretty mess ve air now in, an' no mistake."

"What is to be done?" interrogated Beaufort.

"How the devil do I know?" replied Sam.

"Must we remain here all night?"

"I s'pose so. I sees nuffin else; so ve may as vell make up our minds to it at vonce. The further ve goes, the vorse off ve seems to be. Vell, vot's the odds so long as ye're happy? I think I shall take up my lodging under this here tree till daylight."

"Nonsense," remarked Beaufort, "we must endeavour to persevere. Try to recollect."

"It's all very fine to say that here," returned Sam Filcher, "but who's to do it, I should like to know? Blessed if I arn't keville puzzled. Who'd have thought now that I could ever have got myself into sich a preshus mess. Vell, I never. I say, captain, this here ain't a unlikely spot for them here ghestes an' hobberigoberlins to cut their capers in, as ye're alwus a fancying, eh?"

"Hold yer infernal tongue," said Beaufort, with a look of terror, "I am in no humour for your coarse and ignorant jokes."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the hardened and reckless ruffian, "vot a rum feller yer air to vot I am, to be sure."

"Brutal scoundrel as you now are, you will one day be brought to your senses or I am much mistaken," said Beaufort, "and that much sooner than you seem to expect."

"Vell, be it so," returned Sam, "a cove can't expect to carry on the game for ever. Howsomdever, yer von't find me drop down upon my luck though, whenever my time comes, an' no mistake about that. Vell, s'pose ve has another try to get out of this here confounded puzzle, since yer don't seem hinclined to take up yer lodging here. Come along, captain, though blessed if I knows which vay to go not no more nor a child; an' it's so preshus dark. Keep close to me ag'in, or ve're safe to lose von another, an vot a terrible job that'd be."

Beaufort thought very differently, for nothing would have been a greater relief to him, or afforded him more infinite satisfaction, than to have been able to separate himself from his guilty associate, and never to have beheld him again. But, of course, he was wise enough not to reveal his thoughts to Filcher; knowing the reply he should be sure to receive from him, and suffering him to again grasp his arm, they forced their way through the thicket as well as they could, but without being able to make but very little

progress, and it was again so dark that they could only see for the shortest possible distance before them.

"It's not no use for a gemman to put on his best toggs to travel through sich a place as this here," remarked the facetious Sam; my wardrobe has suffered vofully, an' I shall hardly be fit to make my appearance in 'spectable or fash'nable s'ciety till I've changed my pers'nal appearance. How d'yer feel, captain?"

"Why do you ask the question," replied Beaufort, sullenly, "unless it's in mockery? This cursed place will drive me mad, and it seems as if we should never be able to make our escape from it."

"Vell," observed Sam, "ve may as vell take it coolly, for grumblin' von't not mend the matter."

"Hark," said Beaufort.

"Vot now?" demanded his companion.

"I thought I heard distant thunder."

"That here's not at all unlikely," observed Sam, "an' vot's the konsekens? Ve only vants a rattling storm to render our pleasures complete. There it is ag'in, that here vos thunder an' not no mistake."

A vivid flash of lightning darted in between the branches of the trees, and was succeeded by a deafening peal of thunder that reverberated above, and seemed even to shake the very earth to its centre, and it was quite evident that the storm would soon rage with terrific violence.

Beaufort had never felt more truly wretched and despairing, but it made not the slightest impression upon the incorrigible Sam Filcher, who rather seemed to enjoy the misery of the scene—probably because it so tortured and alarmed his companion—if anything.

"That here vos a bit of a rattler, sure enuff," said Sam; "ve shall have it nicely presently. Here it comes."

The rain now descended in torrents, and not even the thickly interwoven branches could shelter the wretched, benighted travellers from its fury, and the flashing lightning and roaring thunder in such rapid succession was awful in the extreme.

"What a wretched situation is this to be placed in," said Beaufort, shuddering, and unable to withhold the expression of his feelings, although he was very well aware that they would meet with nothing but derision from Filcher; "it is enough to exhaust the patience of any one."

"Vell, it's not von of the pleasantest of nights, I must own," returned Sam.

"And it's all owing to your cursed folly and obstinacy that we are now exposed to it, I'm certain," returned Beaufort.

"How so?" demanded Filcher, sternly.

"Had you taken one of the two roads at

the end of the lane, instead of persisting in entering this wood, we should no doubt have arrived at a place of shelter long before this," replied Beaufort.

"I dare say ve should," returned Sam, ironically; "but sich a von as mightn't have suited yer fancy exactly."

"What do you mean?" interrogated Beaufort.

"Vhy," answered Sam, "ve might have found ourselves in quod, an' no mistake, specially if ve'd happened to have come across them here couple of traps vot ve seed in the lane. Leave me alone, I knowed vot I vos about, but there's no sich thing as pleasing of yer, not no how. Come, rouse yerself, captain, an' bear yer misfortins like a man; it's a no use of being down-hearted about it. Ve'll get over all our difficulties by an'-bye, never fear."

Beaufort could by no means enter into the spirit of Filcher's observations, but he knew it was no use arguing the point with him; he therefore returned no answer, and they again endeavoured to force their way through the thicket, and to extricate themselves from the difficulties by which they were surrounded, and which appeared to increase every moment and to be insurmountable.

CHAPTER CXLVII.

THE FINISH OF THE NIGHT'S ADVENTURE.

Fresh obstacles, however, to their progress seemed to present themselves every moment, and elicited from Sam Filcher—who, notwithstanding all his affected indifference, now appeared in his turn to lose his patience—the most terrible oaths and execrations, the utterance of which, however, seemed to afford his mind some relief.

Beaufort abandoned himself completely to despair, and he felt almost worn out with fatigue and the extraordinary exertions he had undergone.

The war of elements continued to rage with unabated fury, and a more fearful tempest, or more destructive in its consequences had not been known for many years.

Stout trees that had stood for ages, were struck by the lightning, split assunder, and levelled with the dust, and the danger of the guilty men's situation increased every instant, while their chances of deliverance seemed as remote as ever.

The roaring of the thunder was awful to hear, and even the hardened Sam Filcher, who boasted that nothing whatever could daunt his courageous spirit, could not help shuddering at times, and as the lightning flashed at intervals upon his forbidding fea-

tures, it might have been seen, and Beaufort did observe it, that they were ghastly pale, and distorted by evident fear.

He had endeavoured—after his usual fashion—to hum a flash song, in order to convince his companion of his perfect coolness and firmness, but he stopped abruptly and became silent, and apparently lost in thoughts of no very agreeable description, with the exception, when at intervals, he muttered an oath between his teeth.

He, however, continued his hold of Beaufort's arm, and forced him along through the fresh obstacles that arose to impede their progress at every step.

The drenching rain—which, as has been before stated, the thick foliage that formed a canopy above their heads could not shelter them from—served to increase their misery, and, as might be expected, they were soon in as deplorable a situation as could well be imagined, and very ill able to contend with the difficulties by which they were encompassed.

"It is no use struggling," said Beaufort, in a voice of despair, "we appear to become more and more involved in the mazes of this forest every minute, instead of extricating ourselves from them, and I have already endured so much from the great exertions I have undergone, that I am quite exhausted. I do not think it possible, let the consequences be whatever they may, to proceed much farther."

"Oh, gammon," returned Sam, endeavouring to re-assume his usual manner, though it was with a very bad grace that he did so, "yer mustn't give in, in that here way. Never say dead, till yer air dead, captain; ve shall get over this here b'sness presently, I'll varrant. As for this here storm, I didn't relish it much at fust, I can tell yer, but I'm a getting used to it now, so I doesn't mind it. Cheer up, my flower, there's vorserer misfortuns than this here at sea."

"You talk to me in vain, Filcher," replied Beaufort, "for I heed not what you say. This pretended courage will not deceive me. Even now your guilty breast is filled with terror; I marked it in the ghastly expression of your countenance in the glare of the lightning just now."

"It's a lie!" retorted the ruffian, fiercely; "mind vot yer say. D'yer take me for sich a drivelling, snivelling thing as yerself?"

"I believe you to feel as much alarm as myself at present," replied Beaufort; "but this is not the time or the place to argue that point, especially under such fearful circumstances."

"Then ve may as vell drop the subject," said Sam, with a significant loook, "for ve might get to quarrelling if ve says any more about it. Come, let's make another attempt,

an' ve shall succeed at last, captain, I'll be bound."

"It seems to be entirely hopeless," observed Beaufort, "the storm increases rather than abating; how awful is the thunder's roar and the lightning's vivid flash."

"Hollo, captain, cut it, vill yer?" said Sam, "ye're getting too sentymintel. It's a storm though, an' no mistake. My eyes, there vos a flash."

"Forbear, Sam," remonstrated Beaufort, in a tremulous voice, shocked at the levity of his manner, "how can you talk thus in the midst of such a scene of horror?"

"There, no preaching," returned Filcher, in a somewhat more subdued tone, "p'raps I vos a little too fast in vot I said, but I meant no harm. Come, ve can't hexpect never to get over this here trouble if ve stands here pattering. There, the vay is a little more clear afore us now, an' ve shall soon get ourselves a little to rights if it only continnys."

"Have you now any better idea of the way we are going, and any more knowledge of the place?" inquired Beaufort, eagerly.

"Vhy, I think I have," answered his companion, "but I shall be able to tell yer more about it presently, I dare say. But as I've said afore, I ought to know every inch of ground in this here wood, for many's the fust rate job as I've had in it, although that here is many years ago, an' I've not entered it since till now. Damn it, I can't think how I could have been so stupid as to lose myself in this here manner, but it vos all owing to the darkness I s'pose. Let's make the best of it, though, captain, an proceed vvhile ve can do so vvitout so much difficulty. It doesn't seem so dull an' thick before us now, an' vvitout ve've vandered a great deal out of our vay, ve must get to the end of this here precious forest afore long."

Beaufort looked anxiously before him, and as the prospect, as Sam Filcher had said, was far less gloomy and more open than it had hitherto been, he felt his hopes somewhat revived, and endeavoured with the assistance of Sam, to drag on the difficult and miserable way as well as he could.

But the furious raging of the storm, under any circumstances, was sufficient to daunt the courage of any one who might be exposed to it, and the time that had elapsed since Filcher and Beaufort had made their escape from the thieves haunt, and the extraordinary and unexpected fatigue they had had to encounter on their dreary journey was quite enough to exhaust them and to tire their patience, and to give them but little strength to withstand the raging elements.

They were both in a most miserable plight, and Sam Filcher no longer sought to assume a courage and indifference he did not in

reality feel, but his looks showed that he was as anxious to meet with a place of shelter, and arrive at the termination of this unpleasant night's adventure as his unhappy companion.

They proceeded to some distance in silence, and with much difficulty for their limbs were weary, and they suffered a double disadvantage from the weight of their wet clothes, which clung to their limbs, and, of course, greatly impeded their progress.

As they, however, thus slowly advanced, the aspect of the wood improved, and becoming less and less entangled, they were enabled to pursue their way with comparative ease.

Something like a footpath might also be traced into which they immediately struck, with something like a degree of renewed hope.

"This is lucky at last," said Sam Filcher, in tones of satisfaction, "I think we are on the right track now. If I mistake not this here pathway will lead us direct, an' in not no time at all, to the borders of the wood, an' then we may soon expect to reach some place of shelter."

"I only hope that your expectations may not be disappointed," said Beaufort, "for I'm heartily tired of this. But then the lateness of the hour, for it must be full three hours past midnight, will leave us not much chance of obtaining the accommodation of which we stand so much in need."

"But I tell yer we vill," replied Sam, positively, and rather impatiently, "only let us get half a chance, an' vot's to perwent us obtaining all we ax for?"

"We must be cautious how and where we apply," observed Beaufort, "for our appearance is not altogether prepossessing, especially after this exposure to the weather, and might excite suspicion."

"Psha," exclaimed Sam, "ye're alwus a fancying an' fearing summat. Only bacc with caution yerself, d'yer hear, an' leave the rest to me. If yer interferences yer'll make a mess of it; I knows how to play my cards, let the game be votever it may, trust me, an' no von better, so yer needn't alarm yerself about that here. All as yer've got to do is to do as I do."

"Be it so," said Beaufort, appearing satisfied, though in reality he was far from being so, and the conversation dropped.

The tempest had at length somewhat abated in violence, though the rain still descended pretty heavily, and the lightning flashed, and the thunder murmured in the distance at intervals.

Sam and Beaufort continued on their way, pursuing the pathway they had chosen, and almost worn out with fatigue, but in spite of which the former, as the prospect of speedy

deliverance every moment became more apparent, feeling his spirits revive, indulged himself in a little lively whistle, which, however, to the ears of Beaufort sounded remarkably doleful and out of place.

After walking for about another quarter of an hour, during which time the storm had nearly ceased, and the dark and ponderous clouds having dispersed, it had become much more light and cheerful, the two fugitives suddenly emerged from the forest, and then found themselves in an open part of the country, but still as far as their eyes could trace, without the least signs of a human habitation, so that the courage of Beaufort, who was now quite faint and weary, and long since drenched to the skin, again failed him.

"Our prospect of a shelter seems as far off as ever, Filcher," he remarked.

"Not it," replied Sam; "don't yer go for to drop down upon yer luck all at vonce; yer ought to feel satisfied now that we've got through that here damned dreary forest, an' that the storm's nearly over. We shall be housed in not no time at all, take my word for it."

"There are not any signs of that," returned Beaufort, "at least as far as my eyes can trace."

"Ain't there?"

"No; there is nothing but fields and hills before us."

"Say yer know nuffin about it," said Sam, "an' don't yer begin to grow impatient. I remember this here part of the town perfectly, as though it vos only yesterday since I travelled through it."

"And what then?" demanded Beaufort, eagerly.

"Vot then," repeated Sam, "why this here. If I recollects right, at the back of them here hills is a snug little willage, with a comfortable old tavern, at least there vos some twenty years ago, an' it's very strange to me if we can't get accommodated there."

"What, at this hour?"

"Yes, we must wake 'em up; yer never knowed a true Yorkshireman refuse shelter an' refreshment to poor benighted travellers at any hour."

"There is nothing in our appearance to recommend us to their kindness and hospitality," remarked Beaufort.

"There I jist begs to differ from yer," returned Sam, "for I'm sure we looks miserable enuff."

Of course Beaufort could not deny the truth of this, and he said no more, but resolved to leave himself entirely to the guidance of Sam, though he could not help having his doubts and misgivings upon the subject, especially as so many years had elapsed since Filcher had before travelled in

that part of the country, and so many changes often take place in the lapse of time.

However, as he had said, he heartily hoped that his companion would not be disappointed in his expectations, as he had never felt more completely tired and wretched before, and it seemed to him as if he must drop on the road if he had to proceed much farther."

Sam having stopped a minute or two and gazed anxiously and narrowly around him, in order to endeavour to recal to his memory more particularly the place, struck off into a narrow roadway, scarcely wide enough for two persons to walk abreast, a little to the right, and which was somewhat overshadowed by lofty trees that grew on either side of it, and Beaufort, of course, followed.

"Whither will this road lead us to?" asked the latter.

"Why to the back of those here hills yonder," answered Filcher, "an' then ve shall come upon the willage I've been a speaking on directly. Cheer up, captain, for ve shall soon be in comfortable keverters arter all the troubles ve've undergone, I'll varrant."

Beaufort hoped so, and they proceeded along the road as fast as they could.

But they had not gone far, when they were startled and alarmed by the hasty tramp of horses coming from the direction in which they were going, and they suddenly stopped, while Beaufort could not conceal the fears that immediately assailed him.

"Hollo," observed Sam, looking anxiously along the road, "vot's up now? Let's stand aside here in the shade for a minute, an' try to see who's coming."

They did so, and the sounds approached nearer.

"Some danger may threaten us," remarked Beaufort, "and we'd better lose no time in trying to avoid it."

"Hold hard," said Sam, with a look of contempt, "don't frighten yerself to death without a cause. The horsemen are some distance off yet, an' ve've plenty of time to hide ourselves till they've passed."

Beaufort did not much fancy this delay, but he knew it would be no use raising any objection, and he therefore said nothing about it.

Soon after a couple of horsemen appeared in sight, and having, as it seemed, increased their speed, Sam hastily made his way through an opening in the hedge near which they were standing, and Beaufort promptly followed him.

Behind this hedge they could, of course, safely conceal themselves, at the same time they could observe the persons as they passed them. They were not kept long in suspense—the men quickly approached, and they immediately recognised in them the two horse-patrols whom they had seen before.

Not a word was exchanged between them as they passed, and they were quickly hidden from the sight in the distance, and Sam and Beaufort quickly returned from the place of their concealment, the latter much relieved that the danger he had apprehended was over.

"So much for that here adventure," remarked Sam, "ve didn't hexpect to see these traps ag'in so soon, an' p'raps it's keвите as well as they didn't see us."

"Our looks would have been sure to have betrayed us had they done so," said Beaufort.

"Yourn might," returned Sam, "for yer alwus a fright'ning yerself to death, an' air afeared to look anybody in the face."

"And have I not good cause to be so?" interrogated Beaufort, "and how much more reason have you to fear to meet the gaze of any one after the many frightful crimes you have so wantonly and brutally committed?"

"No more of that here if yer please," said Sam, angrily, "am I alwus to be pestered by yer dinging that here in my ears? Vell, it seems that if them here traps vos arter any infortunate devil, they've missed him, without they've caged him. But come along, captain, the coast is clear ag'in, so ve'd better make the best use of our time. I never felt so tired in all my blessed life, an' when I vonce get to sleep, I don't think that I shall ever vake ag'in."

Sam having again glanced along the road, as well as the dim light would permit him, to be certain that there was no one else to observe them, they again proceeded on their way.

Having traversed the road some distance further, an abrupt turning or angle brought them suddenly round to the back of one of the hills, and here Sam stopped and looked eagerly forward, and Beaufort followed his example, but the scene which presented itself to their observation was not one which was calculated to afford either of them much gratification, and evidently caused Sam much astonishment and disappointment.

There were the dark outlines of what had probably once been the village which Sam had mentioned, and where he had expected so confidently that they would have obtained the accommodation they wanted; but it was now an heterogenous mass of blackened ruins, and appeared to have been so for some time, no doubt caused by some fearful catastrophe.

They approached nearer the dismal spot, and viewed it more narrowly, and then it appeared quite evident to them that the destruction before them had been caused by some frightful conflagration, probably several years before, but why the place had been suffered to remain in ruins, it was impossible

to form the slightest conjecture. Sam Filcher stared again and again, seemed scarcely able to believe the evidence of his senses, scratched his head, gave a short whistle, and then ejaculated—

"My preshus eyes, captain, here's a go! The poor old willage, where me an' my pals have passed many a 'appy hour, arter a slice of luck in the forest. Who'd ever have thought it now? here it is now nuffin but a great heap of rubbish. Vell, I am disappointed, an' not no mistake."

"This is a very pretty thing," said Beaufort, with a half muttered oath, "very pleasant, especially in the condition we are now. I thought you were rather too sanguine in your expectations. What is to be done now?"

"I don't know."

"I'm quite exhausted," said Beaufort, seating himself on a heap of the ruins, "and really think I shall die if I don't get some rest."

"Vell, an' how d'yer think as I am?" returned Sam, in surly tones, and following Beaufort's example; "yer thinks as I can stan' anything, I s'pose."

"How far is the next village or town from here?" asked Beaufort.

"Only seven or eight miles, I b'lieve," replied Sam.

"Damnation!" exclaimed Beaufort, unable any longer to restrain the expression of his feelings; "then must we remain here?"

"I s'pose so," returned Sam, coolly, "I s'pose so, as it seems nayther on us can't valk not no further. Vell, it can't be helped, an' vot's the use of a making yer preshus life miserable. We must make the best on it, that's all, captain."

With these words Sam gave another short lively whistle by way of a symphony, and then burst forth into one of his immensely favourite and popular flash ditties, much to the annoyance of Beaufort.

"Sam," said the latter, in a tone of angry impatience, "you seem determined to make a fool of yourself. This is not the time for singing, I should think."

"An' vot the devil's the use of crying?" was the rejoinder, "that von't not mend the matter. Yer sich a von to drop down upon yer luck 'bout trifles, captain; I'm 'shamed on yer."

"This is no trifling dilemma to be placed in, Filcher," said his unhappy companion, "and I am certain you do not view it as such, although you affect to do so. We cannot remain here exposed to the air, and without the means of snatching an hour or two's rest which we so much require."

"But ve must," replied Sam, "yer talk like a fool; how can ve help ourselves since ve can't valk not no further?"

Beaufort again muttered a curse.

"There," observed Filcher, "it's not no use of swearing about it. So it is, an' ve must put up with it. Ah, there's the ruins of the snug old inn, where I've taken many a good glass of grog, an' blowed my veed twenty years ago. How comfortable ve should now have been, had it been still standing. It's keвите mollencholy to think of it."

"This is trifling and a waste of time," said Beaufort, impatiently; "cannot you suggest anything in this emergency, Sam?"

"No, not nuffin," answered the latter, "any more than that ve might move nearer to the high road, p'raps a vaggon would be coming along presently, in which ve might get a lift, an' there ve could take a comfortable snooze for an hour or two. There, vot think yer of that here hidea, captain, eh?"

"I don't approve of it," answered Beaufort, "for it might be fraught with danger."

"There yer air agin. Alwus a raising of some hobjeckshuns, arter axing my hadwice. There's not no pleasing of yer, not no how; so I give it up for a bad job. Yer fears air alwus a filling that here preshus brain of yourn with some nonsense or t'other."

"It would be madness to rush headlong into danger."

"In course it vould."

"Well then it is necessary to act with caution, especially in the peculiar and critical situation in which we are at present placed."

"In course it is."

"Then what is to be done?"

"I tell yer agin," replied Sam, "that that here's jist the very thing as I wants to know, but when I throws out a hint, yer 'mediately rejects it, so I may as vell not say nuffin. This here rubbish von't form a very soft bed or piller, howsomdever, I shall try a pitch, an' I shouldn't at all vonder but I might get a hour or two's doze. Yer can do as yer like—here goes."

As Sam thus spoke, he was about to stretch his weary limbs upon the hard rubbish as contentedly as if it had been a bed of down, when Beaufort seized his arm with a look of alarm and prevented him.

"Filcher," he observed, "this is complete nonsense, we must find some place to conceal ourselves from the observation of any person that may be passing."

"Ve shall be puzzled to do that here, I rayther think," returned Sam Filcher, carelessly, "though I should be very happy if ve could."

"Had we not better take a closer survey of these ruins?" suggested Beaufort, "we might at least find some place which would afford us a partial shelter."

"Vell," answered Sam, approvingly, "that is not altogether a bad thought. An' then,

as I've got some matches an' a bottle of phosph'rous, ve might collect some old vood an' kindle a fire to varm us, eh?"

"No, I would not advise the latter, Sam, because I think it would be rather dangerous," said Beaufort.

"Not it, but how so?"

"Why, the light might attract the attention of some one."

"Nonsense; there's not much fear of any von passing nigh this here gloomy spot; besides if they vos, an' vos to diskiver us vot'd be the odds? They would take us to be two poor fellows had up, an' take pity on us I dare say."

"It will be as well not to run the risk of that," remarked Beaufort; "but come come let us proceed on our search."

"All right," said Sam, rising hastily from the hard couch he had chosen for himself, "come along, an' let's see vot ve shall see."

They walked leisurely on, surveying the ruins anxiously as they proceeded, but without meeting with anything that was at all likely to gratify their wishes. The walls of some of the cottages were standing, but the roofs were gone, therefore there was no chance of a shelter in them, and others were in such a tottering and dilapidated state that they feared to enter them.

But at length they arrived at a large brick building at the further end of what had been the village, and one portion of which seemed scarcely to have sustained any injury, even the windows, several of them remaining unbroken in their frames.

"Ve're all right here, at all events," observed Sam; "this is a slice of luck, an' no gammon. Hooraw! captain, here's a lodging for us at last; not keville so slap as at a fust rate bothell, but wery comfortable to poor devils in our present condishun, so in ve goes."

"Stop," said Beaufort, "let us be cautious. We had better first ascertain whether the place is occupied or not."

"It's not wery likely that it should be," returned Sam, "vith the door off the hinges, unless it's by some poor devils like ourselves, an ve can chime in vith them, I dare say. Let's see."

He advanced to the door—which offered no obstruction to their entrance—as he spoke having first lighted a match from his phosph'rous bottle, and looked anxiously in.

"There's no von here, at any rate, so come along, captain, there's nuffin to fear," he said.

Beaufort followed him into the building cautiously, and Sam lighting another match they found themselves in one of the lower rooms which did not appear to have suffered much by the action of the fire—for such it evidently had been that had consumed the

village, but in which a large quantity of rubbish had accumulated in the lapse of years.

There was a door on one side of the room which opened upon another apartment, and to that Sam Filcher directed his attention.

"Vell," he observed, "this here room is pretty snug-like, arter all the hardships ve've had to endure to-night, but as ve might cotch cold from the draught of that here open door, s'pose ve sees vot the t'other von is made on."

He lighted part of a hay-band, which he found on the floor, and answered the purpose of a temporary torch, and then opening the door him and Beaufort entered the room, and found themselves in a back parlour, which to their no small amazement, and not less gratification, contained some articles of broken furniture, and amongst the rest a mattress, rotten with age, neglect, and the water with which it had probably been saturated on the occasion of the conflagration.

"Here's jist the crib for us, an' no mistake," said Sam, "who'd have thought of meeting vith sich a von? How kind of 'em too, not to remove the furnitur', this here mattress in pertickler, though 'tis not von of the best in the world. Vot say yer, captain? I think ve'll take up our lodging here, eh?"

Beaufort assented, first suggesting that they should endeavour to secure the outer door sufficiently, and so as to prevent any sudden intrusion.

"All right," observed Filcher, "an' then as there's plenty of wood an shavings about, s'pose I light a bit of fire in the grate here jist to give the room a airing?"

To that also Beaufort agreed, and Sam having pretty well secured the outer door by piling rubbish against it, proceeded to gather a quantity of wood which was lying about, and quickly kindled a fire which shed a cheerful blaze, particularly welcome under the circumstances, and to men who had been for so many hours exposed to the inclemency of the weather.

"This here's summat like," remarked Sam, drawing an old broken stool into the chimney corner, and seating himself with a look of evident satisfaction, "an' vot ve never hexpected, eh, captain? I shall jist have a varm, an' henjoy myself with my pipe for about a kevater of a hour, an' then retire to rest. Vot d'yer say, captain? D'yer feel inclined to foller my hexample?"

"No," replied Beaufort, "I shall try to snatch an hour or two's rest, if I can, and as soon as I can, and I should think that you would rather feel inclined for that than your pipe."

"Should yer," returned Sam, blowing a stiff cloud, and seeming to enjoy it amazingly, "vell, I thinks differently yer see, but ewery von to their fancy. Go to snooze if



yer like, I shall not be long arter yer. Pleasant dreams to yer, captain."

Beaufort examined the mattress, and although he did not much like the appearance of it, he felt so completely tired that he waved all objections, and stretching his limbs upon it, endeavoured to compose himself to sleep.

Sam Filcher having now got pretty warm, by renewing the fire, felt himself quite at home, and continued to enjoy his pipe, until quite overcome, his head fell back against the wall, the pipe dropped from his hand, his eyes closed, and, after yawning two or three times, his loud snoring was more than sufficient to prove that he was sound asleep

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

MORE ADVENTURES.

It was not long before Beaufort, like his companion, worn out with fatigue, fell off to sleep; but it was anything but refreshing; his guilty conscience, and the fears that continually haunted and tormented him, conjured up the most strange and frightful dreams, from which he had frequently started, the perspiration standing in huge drops upon his temples, and with the impression so strong upon his disordered imagination that for a few minutes he could scarcely persuade himself that what he had seen in his visions had not actually taken place.

Some hours had probably elapsed, when

he awoke in terror from one of those frightful dreams—in which he had fancied that the officers of justice had just seized him and Sam Filcher—and, for a few moments, his brain was so bewildered, that he could not imagine where he was, and half fancied that he was already in a dungeon.

But at length the excitement of Beaufort somewhat abated, and his recollection returned, still it was some time before he could banish the effects of his dreams from his mind, and he felt himself far from easy where he was, although there was not the least apparent danger to apprehend.

It was now broad daylight, and the early morning's sun was forcing its way into the room through the dirty and broken windows.

Sam Filcher still slept soundly, and did not seem likely to wake some time, and for a few minutes Beaufort was too busily occupied with his own painful and perplexing reflections to disturb him.

At length, however, thinking it necessary that they should depart from the place where they were, and feeling greatly to require some refreshment, he having fasted for many hours, Beaufort did arouse him, and Sam started from his slumbers with an oath upon his lips, and in no very pleasant humour altogether.

"Hollo!" he exclaimed, rubbing his eyes, and gazing stupidly and vacantly around him, "vot the devil's the matter?—Is the crib on fire, or is any von taken suddenly ill? It's a damned shame that a feller can't get a moment's rest in peace here, Hallo! vot's the meanin' ov all this here?—Vhere am I."

"Don't you remember?" replied Beaufort.

"Ah! captain, my flower is that yer?" said Filcher, "vot a pitty 'tis as yer disturbed me; yer've voked me out of von of the most pleasantest dreams I ever had in my life. I thought as yer an' I vere standing on the scaffold waiting to be scragged, as ve shall be von of these here days, the halter vos round our preshus necks, the cap vos drawn over our faces, an' ve vos just a going to dance upon nuffin, when there vos sich a shout among the crowd, an, a mounted messenger rode up to the scaffold in breathless haste to announce that ve vos pardoned. Ve vos unpinion'd 'medately, half a pint of brandy hadminister'd to each on us, to revive us,—taken back into the pris'n; and had a glorious blow out of tripe an' hingsions, afore ve vos discharged. Don't I vish as I vos henjoying that here now, for I'm so preshus hungry that I could eat a jack boot."

Beaufort looked upon the ruffian for a moment with a feeling of disgust, but made no remark upon what he had said.

"You have slept long enough," he said,

"the sun has evidently risen some hours, and it's time that we departed from here."

"Vell," returned Sam, "to judge from my preshus happytight, I should say that it vos, rayther. Vot a slice of luck it would be if ve vos only to drop upon some crib where ve could get a jolly good meal, but there's not no chance of a doing that here I'm afraid till ve've travelled some miles. How d'yer feel now, Captain?"

"Heartily tired of this wandering, wretched, and guilty life;" answered Beaufort with a dismal look.

"Yes, that here's alwus yer way," remarked Sam, "ye're alwus a making of yerself miserabel about nuffin. I'm sure it's a pleasant life enuff for variety, an' I henjoys it; but yer've got no taste yer ain't. It's lucky ve dropped in here, though, arter all, for ve should have been in for it, if ve hadn't."

"And whither do you now propose that we shall direct our steps?" interrogated Beaufort, anxiously.

"Vhy, towards the place where ve air the most likely to get vot ve vants, to be sure," replied Filcher; "I knows the road pretty vell now ve've got here, an' I shall be able to recollect it better when ve've valk'd a little way, I dare say, spheshully now its daylight."

"We must endeavour to avoid being seen, as much as possible," observed Beaufort, "any one should recognise us from the description of our persons that has been so frequently given in the newspapers, and the placards that have been posted every where."

"There, don't be fright'nin yerself as yer alwus does to no purpose;" returned Sam, "ve must take our chance as to who ve may meet vith on the road, in course, but who's to know us in our present trim? Keep up yer pluck, captain, as I've often told yer before, an' ve shall be all right no doubt, now air yer ready to start?"

Beaufort replied in the affirmative.

"Vell then," said Sam, "the sooner ve're off the better. But stop, just let's see vot sort of a prospects afore us, an' whether the coast is clear."

He opened one of the windows with some little difficulty, as he thus spoke, and looked out anxiously upon the view which was commanded from it, and which was one of the most extensive and romantic description, and upon which the sun was now shining with great splendour, for it was a most beautiful morning after the previous night's storm.

"Very pleasant, wery pretty," said Sam, in the tone of one who was a most enthusiastic admirer of the beauties of nature; "this is a wery nice prospect in the sunshine, arter trav'lling through that here cursed forest last night, an' in that preshus storm, ain't it?"

"Yes, it is somewhat cheering," replied Beaufort; "but does the place seem familiar to you?"

"I should think it does too, rayther," returned Filcher; "why Lor love yer, I recollects it now as vell as if I'd travell'd through it only t'other day. Yinders the road as leads to the town of—I forgets the name, about six mile off, as nigh as I can remember. beyond which, a little to the left is the high road, as leads in the direckshun of Scarbro', though that's a devil of a distance. Come, along Captain, I feels keвите at home now, an' doesn't care for nuffin, only the sooner I gets summat into the witlin' hoffice I shall like it all the better. If ve could only jist have a vash an' arrange our vardrobe a bit, ve should be first rate; howsomdever, it can't be helped, an' so ve must put up vith it."

Beaufort surveyed the person of Sam Filcher and his own, and was compelled to admit the truth of that gentleman's observations; but as there were no means of altering it, he said no more about it, and having taken another anxious glance at the country before them, he followed Sam Filcher from the old building which had afforded them a much better shelter than they had expected, to find, and they instantly (as there was no one about to observe them, or excite their alarm or suspicion) prepared to resume their journey.

But in passing one of the walks of the building, a large poster attracted the attention of Beaufort, and no sooner had his eyes glanced over the first two or three lines than he turned ghastly pale and trembled violently, which immediately caught the observation of Sam Filcher, and as likewise did the bill which he was so anxiously and fearfully looking at.

"I see ye're all in a fever, Captain," he said; "is that here bill anything that concerns us?"

"Yes," replied Beaufort, "read it and you will find that with all our care and fancied security, suspicion of the cruel act of incendiarism at the farm of Henry Ashford has lighted upon us; and this gives a full description of our persons as we were last seen, and offers a large reward for our apprehension."

"Ah, I see," replied Sam, carelessly, "wery kind an' thoughtful of 'em, too, to take sich a hinstint in us, an' to wallee us so highly. I vonder who's done this?—That here old Skevire Stubbles I dare say, for he's got the blunt. I only vish as how I had the hopper-tunity of paying my respec's to him, an' easing him of a little of it, I might chance to silence him for the futur' at the same time. But they may all be damned together, they're not a going to catch ould Sam Filcher so easy as they seem to think."

"It will indeed be strange indeed," said Beaufort, "now that our names and persons have become so notorious, if we escape much longer. This is no more than I feared."

"Never mind vot yer feared," observed Sam; "ye're alwus a fearing of summat.—Come along an' don't stand staring at that here bill any longer."

Beaufort cast one more fearful glance at the bill, and then looked round to see whether or not there was any one near to watch them, but Sam Filcher, whose patience was exhausted, with an oath grasped him by the wrist, and drew him forcibly away from the spot, towards a field before them, which they traversed in silence, and were about to enter upon the road which Sam had pointed out from the window of the old building, when Beaufort suddenly stopped, and in a tremulous voice demanded;

"Had we not better, if possible, avoid this public road, Filcher?"

"No," replied the latter, sharply, "d'yer vant to get into the same puzzle as ve vos last night?"

"No," returned Beaufort, "but after what we have just seen, I want to avoid being observed by any one, if possible."

"And I vants my breakfast," said Sam, abruptly, "an' I means to get it too, as soon as I can, I tell yer agin that this here's the road to the town, an' if ve goes any other vay, why ve may go vandering on till night, an' then not find any place of hackomydashun. So, come along, an' don't raise any more hobjeekshuns."

Beaufort knew that it would be in vain to do so, and he therefore did not attempt it, but very reluctantly, and oftentimes looking back, followed Sam into the road, which was bounded on either side by green fields and rich pasture land, on which the bright morning sun shed its most cheerful beams.

Nothing seemed to trouble the mind of Sam Filcher but his great anxiety to refresh his inward man, but Beaufort's thoughts, as might be expected, after what he had seen, were of the most torturing description, and again all his fears and misgivings were excited to the most painful degree, and he dreaded meeting any one lest himself and Filcher should be recognized.

Sam noticed his agitation, and readily guessing what was the cause, he rallied him upon it in his usual manner.

"Vell, I'd hate myself," he observed with a look of ineffable contempt, "if I vos only 'alf sich a chicken-hearted feller as yer air. Why even the sight of a bill, as none of the bumkins about here can read, frightens yer. I s'pose, an' waiting to be topped. Bah! why even a preshus ould 'oman has got more pluck than yer have."

"Cease your brutal taunts and jeers, Fil-

cher," returned Beaufort; "for I am not in the mood to put up with them."

"You put hup vith 'em!" repeated the ruffian, "ha, ha, ha!—You put hup vith 'em!" he reiterated, with increased contempt; "come, I likes that. Vot if I vos to say as yer must, an' that yer can't help yerself, as yer knows yer can't; yer'd ride rusty I s'pose, an' slip into me, wouldn't you? Ha, ha, ha!—I s'pose now ye're trembling in them here blessed crabs of yours, for fear that ve should be detected by the fust person as ve sees; but yer'd better mind vot I ses, and keep yer pecker up, or it'll be worse for yer. It's not likely that ve can travel on in the broad daylight vithout meeting no von; asides ve must brave it out at the fust crib of hackomydashun ve comes to, an' no mistake."

"Sam," said Beaufort, "your brutal conduct, and atrocious crimes have placed us in a dilemma from which we cannot extricate ourselves, and you must know and feel it, however much you may affect to the contrary."

"Not I," replied Sam, "I'm not a going to drop down upon my luck jist yet, I tell yer, if yer air. In course, if yer hacts in the way that yer does, ve shall stand a wery good chance of being diskiver'd; but I tell yer agin that yer'd better mind vot ye're about, or—but, no matter, yer hunderstand me."

"Think not to frighten me by your threats," said Beaufort, plucking up a little more resolution; "for I heed them not."

"Yer don't?"

"No."

"Vell, ve shall see. But let's have no more of this here nonsense. Come along, for when a poor devil's hungry belly calls aloud for wittals, there's not no time for skulking."

The wretched Beaufort had no other alternative but to obey, and he therefore, with a sad and foreboding heart followed Sam Filcher, who whistled and sung as though he was perfectly at his ease, which he certainly was not.

"Vot a pleasant walk this here is to give a feller a happyite," he remarked, "that is if he should happen to vant von, vich I can't say is my case at present. I'm so preshus hungry, I could almost gnaw the bark off the trees. Oh, vot wouldn't I give to be a eating that here blow out of tripe an' hingsuns, I fancied I vos doing in my dream? My mouth keвите vaters at the thought, I'm sartin sure that when I vonce begin eating ag'in, I shall never leave off not no more."

Thus the facetious Sam, aroused himself, and passed the tedious time away as they pursued their journey; but Beaufort was too busily engaged in his own dismal thoughts, and in looking around him, fearing detection and apprehension, and starting at

the least sound, to take much heed of what he said.

The scenery on either side of the road, the farther they proceeded became more lovely and diversified, and in any other breasts than those of the guilty Sam Filcher, and his guilty, conscience stricken companion, must have excited feelings of the most unbounded admiration. In fact, it was one of the most beautiful parts of the fine county of Yorkshire that they were then travelling through, and it was seen to every advantage on that fine bright morning.

For some distance they proceeded on the road without encountering any one, much to the relief of Beaufort, who, notwithstanding he was faint with hunger, could not but look forward to their arrival at the town which Sam Filcher had spoken of, with an unconquerable feeling of dread.

At length the tinkling of small bells, at a short distance behind them, saluted their ears, being the first sounds they had heard since they had left the old building, and Beaufort suddenly stopped and looked at Sam with an expression of alarm.

"Now then," said the latter, sternly, "vot have yer got to frighten yerself about? It's nuffin more nor a vaggin vot's coming this way."

"Let us avoid it, Filcher," said Beaufort, anxiously.

"Not a bit of it," replied Sam, obstinately.

"There might be danger, Sam," suggested Beaufort.

"Danger be damned," returned Filcher, "vot have two sich fellers as us got to fear from a country joskin of a vagginer, eh? He's more likely to give us a lift on the road, vich would be wery handy jist now, as ve air nayther of us in wery good condishun for valking arter our last night's unkimmin exertion. Here he comes, no doubt he's trigged us afore now, so it vould be no use of trying to get out of the way, if there vos any occasion for it. Let's pull up, captain, an' vait his coming."

Beaufort endeavoured to conquer his fears and misgivings, which, as has been shown, the slightest circumstance excited, but he felt far from satisfied or easy, and those feelings were strengthened by the appearance of the waggoner, who was a surly-looking man, and seemed to eye them with looks of suspicion as he approached.

"Remember vot I've said; no funking, but do as I does," whispered Sam in Beaufort's ear, and with a threatening look.

Beaufort took not the trouble to return any answer, and in fact, before he could have had time to do so, the waggoner with his team had arrived at the spot where they were standing, and eyed them with looks that

were anything but agreeable, and seemed to say that he thought them no better than they should be, and that he would much rather have their room than their company.

In fact the black eyes of Sam Filcher, which he had received in the affray at the old house, and their general dirty and ragged appearance, were anything but prepossessing, and probably they had never looked their characters more faithfully than they did on that occasion.

Sam Filcher with his usual familiar and insinuating manner, approached the countryman, and extending his hand, said—

"Good morning, friend."

"I be na friend o' you'rn, and I doant want to be," returned the waggoner in the most surly tones, and again eyeing Filcher and Beaufort with looks of the utmost suspicion, much to the alarm of the latter, though he endeavoured to conceal it, and he heartily wished that they were far away from him, or that they had never encountered him at all.

"Come, old feller," remonstrated Sam, "that here's not a wery perlite answer of yourn, howsomdever, when a gemman speaks to yer."

"A gemman," repeated the countryman, with a look of the most sovereign contempt, "haw, haw, haw! ye be'st two foine looking gemmen, I must zag; haw, haw, haw! I wish to tell 'ee, that the stocks an' the cage be not far off, so if ye be wise ye'll tak' another road."

"Vot d'yer mean, chawbacon?" demanded Sam, indignantly.

"Why," returned the waggoner, apparently not the least alarmed by Sam Filcher's fierce looks, "there ha' been a mighty lot o' robberies, an' murders, an' fires about the country o' late, an' you an' your companion here, do look jist the sort o' fellers that could do that sort o' business."

"Damn yer, take that for yer compliment," said the enraged Sam, at the same time knocking the countryman's hat over his eyes, and planting him a blow in the stomach at the same time.

The waggoner was in no way daunted, but hastily raising his hat, he flourished his whip, and laid about him so lustily over the shoulders and legs of Filcher and Beaufort, that they swore and hallowed aloud, and cut more curious capers than they had done for many a day, apparently much to the amusement of their assailant, who roared with laughter all the time.

While the countryman was proceeding with his castigation with unabated vigour, and Sam and his companion had no chance of defending themselves, or resenting it, a posse of rustics appeared a short distance off along the road, hastening to the scene of the

conflict, and Sam and Beaufort both now terrified out of their wits, saw the necessity of immediate flight, and hastily making their way from the road into the adjoining fields, they scampered across them with breathless participation, not venturing to look behind them, though they could hear the shouts of the countrymen in hot pursuit.

CHAPTER CXLIX.

THE VILLAINS LODGED AT LAST.

Beaufort was never more alarmed in his life, and even the hardened and desperate Mr. Sam Filcher was scarcely in any better condition, for, independent of his rage at the castigation he had so unexpectedly received, the chance of being apprehended, in spite of his assumed bravado, as he would have said himself, "took all the pluck out of him."

The countrymen seemed determined to have them, if possible; and certainly, taking the exhausted state of the two ruffians into considerations, and the rough treatment they had received at the hands of the waggoner, the advantage was all on their side.

They kept up the pursuit with unabated perseverance and determination, sometimes gaining so rapidly upon them, that the result appeared to be inevitable, and the unhappy Beaufort, at any rate, gave himself up for lost.

What rendered the chances more against them was, that it was a series of long open fields, that they had to traverse, so that there was no place where they could elude their pursuers by concealing themselves, and then there were many other obstacles thrown in their way, for they had to leap ditches, and force their way through thick-set hedges in the course of their flight.

However, at last the voices of their pursuers gradually became more and more indistinct, until they died away altogether, and it seemed that at length, tired with their exertions, they had abandoned the chase.

Completely breathless, and the perspiration rolling off them, Sam and Beaufort now stopped, and looking back over the ground they had traversed, could see nothing of the rustics, they therefore concluded that they had fairly made their escape from the imminent danger which had threatened them, for the present, at any rate.

"Vell," said Sam, "dashing the perspiration from his forehead, "this is a bellowser, and no mistake; damn them here chawbacons, they can run though. But ve've bested 'em at last, eh, captain?"

Beaufort was panting for breath, and otherwise too much agitated to reply.

"Oh, I see," remarked Sam, "yer done up, baked, reg'larly floored, as ve ses in the clarsicks. Vell, to be sure ve did have a bit of a teasing, an' sich a von as I didn't bargain for. Damn that yer vagginer, who'd ha' thought he'd got so much pluck in him? Didn't he know how to use his vhip nayther? It vos a pantymine, an' not no mistake."

"Yes," said Beaufort, sarcastically, and smarting under the punishment he had received, "and in which you played clown with great effect."

"Good, my noble," returned Sam, good-humouredly, "yer may take a chalk there, I think; only jist allow me to complement yer on the hability vith which yer played harleykin; I never seed yer dance so vell in all my life as vhen that joskin's vhip vos a twisting round that here place where yer calves ought to be."

"Sam," said Beaufort, with a most woful expression of countenance, "this is no subject for jesting. The danger I apprehended has overtaken us, and all through your cursed obstinacy."

"Vot d'yer mean?"

"What do I mean? Need you ask the question? Have we not been detected, and can we take any course without running the risk or apprehension?"

"Nonsense; yer alwus meets troubles half way. The fellers have given up the chase, haven't they? an' vot have ve got to fear?"

"They will no doubt spread the news, and means will be immediately taken to apprehend us."

"Nuffin of the sort. They'll have all their vork to do to catch us if they do," said Sam.

"Had you taken my advice," said Beaufort, "all this danger might have been avoided."

"How so?" demanded Sam.

"Had you not persisted in taking the high road," answered Beaufort, "we should not have encountered that confounded countryman, and got ourselves into such a scrape. How are we to get out of it?"

"In the best way ve can."

"You have little cause to be so careless about it, Sam," said Beaufort, "your obstinacy and over cunning will be the ruin of us."

"Vot's the use of talking in that manner?" said Sam, impatiently, "the job's done an' can't be undone, but ve shall hear no more about it, I'll varrant. I only vish I had that infernal vagginer vithout his vhip though, I'd polish him off to some tune, an' not no mistake. But come, it's no use standing

here grumbling, ve must make our way to the town somehow, for I'm so hungry bless'd if I can stand it much longer."

"It will not be safe for us now to venture to the town," remarked Beaufort.

"Vont it? vell ve'll see about that," said Sam.

"That countryman no doubt is going there, and will be sure to carry the news there."

"Vell," returned Sam, "ve must chance that. I can't go vithout my breakfast much longer. Come along, I must try an' find a near cut across these here fields if I can."

Beaufort in vain sought to conquer the fears that were now excited in his breast, and with such good reason; but knowing how completely useless it was for him to try to oppose the will of his guilty associate, he followed him in silence, though he could not help thinking, after what had occurred that their detection and apprehension was certain. No doubt, he thought, from the observations which the waggoner had made use of, that if he had not absolutely read the description of their persons, now published in all parts of the country, and recognized them, his suspicions had been aroused, and that the pursuit, notwithstanding it had apparently for the present been abandoned, would be renewed, and they would find it difficult, if at all possible to escape.

Such were the thoughts and forebodings that continued to haunt and torture the mind of the wretched Beaufort, and every minute his fears increased instead of abating.

But no apprehensions seemed to disturb the mind of Sam Filcher, or at any rate if they did he took good care to conceal them, and he again began singing after his usual fashion, on occasions of difficulty and danger.

"Ve must go back in the same direction as ve vos trav'ling afore," he observed, "or ve may vander for a month vithout coming to any place where ve can get vot ve vant."

"Are you mad?" said Beaufort, suddenly stopping and fixing upon him a look of alarm; or are you bent on our destruction?"

"Nayther," replied Sam, "so yer need not flurry yerself."

"It would certainly seem as though you were," remarked Beaufort, "for to retrace our steps is to deliberately throw ourselves in the way of detection."

"Yell, it can't be helped," said Sam, carelessly; "ve must take our chance, let consequences be votever they may. Ve must cut across the fields as near the road as ve can, an' then ve shall be able to reach the town I dare say."

"Where we shall find the officers waiting to receive us, no doubt," said Beaufort.

"Psha! vot a feller to alarm yerself for nuffin, to be sure. But yer'd better vake up

I can tell yer, for yer looks is enuff to betray us, an' ve must brave this here b'sness out, somehow or t'other. Come along, I say, for ve've already delayed too long."

"Sam, said Beaufort with a look of increased terror, "I will go no further in the direction which you propose."

"Yer vont?"

"No."

"Then I say yer must," returned Sam, with a look of determination, "so that's all about it. Yer know its no use yer being hobstinate with me. So come along and make no more fuss about it."

Filcher grasped his wrist as he thus spoke, and hurried him away from the spot, and Beaufort, who now gave himself up for lost, was unable to offer any further resistance.

As they proceeded, Beaufort looked fearfully around him, apprehensive every moment of some approaching danger, and expecting to see their pursuers, and at times so overcome by his fears that he could almost fancy he could hear their footsteps behind them.

Across the fields, however, in the same direction that they had been going when they so unfortunately encountered the sturdy countryman, Sam Filcher hurried him, and whistled and sung as merrily as if nothing had occurred to disturb or alarm them, and they soon arrived once more in sight of the high road, which Sam, however, as he had stated he would, carefully avoided, leading the way by the side of it across the fields.

Never surely had two unfortunate wretches been exposed to such difficulties and dangers before, or experienced so tedious a journey. It seemed as if, in fact, it would never be brought to an end, and it was no wonder that the patience of Beaufort, and that of Filcher also, although he took good care to conceal it, should be quite exhausted.

Besides they were worn out with fatigue and hunger, and their prospects of relief seemed to be as remote as ever.

"It vos a confounded bad job as ve met with that here damned country bumpkin," said Sam Filcher at last, suddenly stopping in his harmony, and looking anxiously at the distance before them:—"for its caused sich a preshus delay; ve might have been at the town long afore this, if it hadn't been for that here. Howsomdever, ve may think ourselves lucky, an' no mistake, that ve vos able to give those joskins leg bail. I never runned so fast in my life afore; not that I vos afraid, an' you stepped out a bit too, captain. Oh, ain't I preshus angry; how d'yer feel, my flower?"

"How do you expect me to feel?" replied Beaufort, "but I care more for the dangers by which we are surrounded than anything else."

"Danger be damned," returned Sam, "I'm so confounded hungry that I haven't time to think of that here."

"How much further have we to go, before we reach the town you have spoken of?" interrogated Beaufort.

"Can't say; answered Filcher, "that here blessed town seems to have moved further away since I last visited it. Come along, 'tis no use dropping down upon it; ve shall get there before night I reckon."

Beaufort said no more, but with the same sad and foreboding feelings as those we have described, followed reluctantly his guilty associate; and they met with nothing that was at all calculated to excite their alarm on the way, though the apprehensions of the wretched Beaufort remained the same.

At length, however, Sam suddenly stopped and slapped his thigh with much evident satisfaction, and Beaufort anxiously inquired the cause of this apparent unwarranted display.

"Vhy, don't yer see?" replied Sam, pointing towards the road before them, "yer must be blind if yer don't, that's all about it. Vell, this is a slice of luck an' no mistake. That here crib must have growed up since I vos this here vay afore. Ve shall get a tightner at last, I dare say."

Beaufort, of course, looked in the direction to which Sam Filcher pointed, and at a short distance off beheld a solitary building, which from the horse-trough before it, and its swinging sign, was doubtless used as a tavern, or road-side inn; but the sight of this hostelry did not afford Beaufort quite the same feelings of satisfaction that it did his companion, in fact, even exhausted and in want of relief as he was, he dreaded to approach it lest they should there meet with those persons whom they were so anxious to avoid, and which seemed to him to be not at all unlikely.

"Vell," observed Sam, with an increased look of satisfaction, "this is von of the most pleasantest sights as I've seen for some time. It's sich a relief for a hungry belly. Come along, captain, an' ve shall be all right at last in not no time at all."

"I fear to enter that house," said Beaufort, hesitating.

"In course yer does," returned Sam, with a look of contempt, "I should vonder if yer didn't, cos yer alwus a fearing."

"You would do well not to treat my fears so lightly," suggested Beaufort; "those who pursued us with such fierce determination might chance to be there, and then how could we hope to escape?"

"Bah," ejaculated Sam Filcher, impatiently, "if ve air to suffer such stupid fears to annoy us, ve may go vithout grub for ever. I shall go to the crib at vonce an'

chance it. An' yer'd better rouse yerself up a bit, captain, or yer'll be getting us into some hobble by them here preshus looks of yourn."

With these words Sam stepped from the field into the road, hastily approaching towards the inn, and Beaufort had no other alternative but to follow him, which he did, however, as may be supposed, most reluctantly, and with the same dismal forebodings as had before haunted and beset his mind.

Sam took a survey of the building which seemed to please him vastly, and then listened attentively at the door before he ventured to enter.

"Vell," said Sam, "all's keviet enuff, there's not no company here that's sartin, so that yer may as vell send yer fears to the devil, captain; a nice comfortable-looking crib it is, an no mistake, hers gees to try its kevality."

Beaufort did feel a little more confident, and he followed Sam Filcher into the tavern, and the former walked without any further ceremony into a room which he saw before them, and where there was no one to be seen.

"Vell," said Sam, throwing himself on a seat before the fire, "this is all right, an' couldn't have 'appened more lucky. Ve're lodged at last, captain. Now for a tightner"

He pulled the bell, and thumped on the table as he spoke, and awaited impatiently the appearance of the landlord.

CHAPTER CL.

THE SMUGGLERS.

They were kept waiting long, for the worthy host, who was a bluff good-tempered looking man, entered the room, and eyed his new and unknown guests narrowly, and did not seem to much admire their personal appearance, which it is almost unnecessary to repeat was far from prepossessing, especially the black eyes of Sam Filcher, which the landlord seemed to view with suspicion.

Beaufort shrunk beneath his scrutiny, but Sam Filcher met it with his usual indifference, and bowed politely, and with a familiar smile, said in the most agreeable tones he could assume,

"Good morning to yer, guvner; 'appy to see yer, me and my friend here, this gemman rekieves some refreshment, an' a good quantity of it, too, both grub an' drink, as kevik as possible, ve're both as 'ungry as 'unters."

"Well," replied the landlord, still eyeing them suspiciously, "you do look hungry enough, to be sure, an' I must say that you be not the most respectable looking customers

as I have seen lately. What are you? tramps?"

"Vell," returned Sam, "that's rayther a strange keveshtun to ax. Homsomdever, ve're not no cadgers, old feller, and means to pay for vot ve has. Praps yer'd like the blunt fast, an' we're not vithout the tin, yer see."

So saying in order to convince and reassure the doubtful host, Sam Filcher produced a handful of silver from his pocket, and tossed it on the table."

"You seem to have been lucky," said the host; "I hope you've got this money by honest means."

Beaufort trembled, and wished himself heartily away, but Sam assumed a tone of indignation, said:

"D'yer take us to be thieves, guvner, cos ve're not toggod so vell as ve might be? Ve're 'spectable trav'lers, an' vell connected, I can tell yer."

"Well I hope so," said the landlord, "we can't always judge from appearances, to be sure; but there are a great many bad characters about the country."

"I dare say there is," said Sam, with a plausible look, which seemed to make some little more favourable an impression on the mind of the landlord, "more's the pity. But come, old feller, yer seem to forget that ve air as hungry as two preshus volves, an' the sooner ve alters that here the better. I s'pose yer satisfied now an' haven't not no hobjeckshun to sarve us?"

"All right, what shall I bring you?" said the landlord, in more agreeable tones.

"The very best as yer've got in the house, both to eat an' drink, and mind yer, plenty of it too."

"Very well, I'll attend you," said the worthy host.

He bustled out of the room as he spoke, and Sam closed the door after him, and then approaching Beaufort, who looked anything but satisfied, he whispered—

"There, I think I've done that to rights, eh, captain? Ve're all right now. Vot air yer looking so dismal about, eh?"

"We're in danger here, I'm certain," replied Beaufort, also speaking in a low tone, and in a tremulous voice, "I did not like the suspicious looks with which the landlord eyed us."

"Ye're a cowardly fool," said Filcher, "an' air frightening yerself into fits, vithout any 'casion. There's not nuffin to fear, an' I feels myself kevik at home an' at my ease now, an' shall be as right as a trivet arter some grub an' lush. There, pull yerself together captain."

The observations of Sam, however, had but little effect on Beaufort, who wished himself safe out of the house again.



The landlord quickly made his re-appearance, bringing in a plentiful supply of good, but homely fare, which was a most agreeable sight to Sam Filcher, and even Beaufort could not behold it, hungry as he was, without feelings of satisfaction.

"That's the ticket, guvner," said Sam, in a complimentary tone, "ye're the best friend as I've seen for many a day. Much obliged to yer for this here bit of a snack, me an my friend will pay our 'spects to it directly. Can ve have the hackommydashun of this here room to ourselves, can't ve?"

"Yes," replied the landlord, "I'm not likely to be troubled with customers at this hour in the morning."

"Vell then," remarked Filcher, "ve shall stay here for an hour or two and enjoy ourselves."

The landlord returned no answer to this, but, if his thoughts could be conjectured by his looks, he seemed to consider that the sooner his questionable guests took their departure the better.

He retired from the room, and Sam immediately commenced a vigorous attack upon the drink and viands, inviting Beaufort to follow his example, which the latter was by no means backward in doing, and they both of them enjoyed the meal which they had so long required heartily.

"That's summut like," said Sam, at length laying down his knife and fork, when he was fairly beat, "now I think I shall do for a hour or two. Vell have a pipe an' plenty of lush, an' enjoy our preshus selves, eh, captain?"

"Let us not remain here," said Beaufort,

"for we know not the danger there may be in doing so."

"Stuff," returned Sam, "yer heard vot the landlord said, that ve needn't fear any hintruders at this here time of the day. So as ve has got into good kevarters, ve'd better make ourselves comfortable till the evening, when ve can go on our vay vithout so much fear of being seen by any von.

Beaufort again expressed his dissatisfaction at this arrangement, but it was all to no purpose, and Sam having again summoned the landlord and paid for what they had "like a trump," as he said, ordered more grog, and filling his pipe, set to to enjoy himself with much spirit, and Beaufort finding that to remain obstinate was useless, endeavoured to banish his doubts and apprehensions, and to follow his example.

"Ah," observed Sam, after he had moistened his pipe with a hearty draught, "this is summat like, and it does my eyes good to see yer now, captain. Vot's the use of dropping down on yer luck when there's no 'casion?"

"No occasion," repeated Beaufort, "his gloomy thoughts and feelings again beginning to get the ascendancy over him, "have we not every cause to fear the worst?"

"Not a bit of it," returned Sam, "I never fears not nuffin."

"This is mere sham and bravado, Filcher; you do not mean what you say."

"Don't I?"

"No, I am perfectly satisfied that, in spite of all your empty boasting and affected indifference, that you entertain the same apprehensions as I do."

"Not niver," exclaimed Sam, indignantly, and throwing the pipe which he had been so vigorously smoking on the floor in the excitement of his feelings, "blest if I wouldn't cut my preshus throat if I thought I did."

"You must, I say again," repeated Beaufort, positively, "and all that you may protest will not convince me to the contrary."

"Cos ye're a hidgut," returned Filcher, with an oath, of course, by way of embellishment; "vot I, Sam Filcher, the Sprig of Myrtle, him as fit the celybrated Hookem Snivey, hentertain the same feelings as sich a snivelling cur as yerself, come I likes that here. That is rich."

"You may as well be a little more choice in your language, Filcher," said Beaufort, with an angry look, "not quite so liberal in your epithets when addressing yourself to me, if you please. However, I heed but little what you say. You must inwardly admit that you feel yourself far from easy."

"Easy," reiterated Sam, with a scornful laugh, "now do I look as though I vos very unhappy? Vot have I to make me so, I should like to know? Arn't I jist had a

tightner like a halderman; can't ve have plenty of lush an' baccy, an' vot more d'yer vant? But come, I say, captain, I doesn't vish to quarrel vith yer, cos I feels myself in a verry good humour, but I'm sick of this vhinig an' fearing, so jist be so good as to cut it, if yer please, an' let us be merry an' happy while ve can, and the devil take the futur, I say."

"That future which you pretend so much to despise," retorted Beaufort, with an impressive look, which was, however, completely lost upon his hardened and reckless companion, "will be a terrible one to us, and we may well dread it. The hour of retribution will arrive, depend upon it, and that much sooner than we may anticipate."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sam Filcher, heartily, "vot a fust rate tub-thumper yer'd make, to be sure. Vot a pity it is as how yer don't hold forth, vot a blessing it'd be to s'ciety. Vell, yer'd better drink arter that here, it vants summat to vash it down, an' no mistake."

In order the more forcibly to illustrate his observations, Sam Filcher took up a jug containing a full quart of ale, and tossed it off at a draught.

"There, captain," he said, smacking his lips, and filling another pipe when he had accomplished this feat, "that's the vay to do it, an' the sooner yer follers my hexample the better, an' cut yer ranting an' preaching."

"Hush," hastily enjoined Beaufort, with a look of alarm.

"Now then," impatiently ejaculated Sam, "yer hup to yer games ag'in, air yer?"

"Silence," again fearfully and tremulously urged Beaufort, grasping his arm, and pointing significantly towards the door.

"Vell, I sees that's a door, don't I? an' vot of that here?" said Filcher, in surly tones.

"I thought I heard some one whispering outside just now," replied Beaufort, in low and timid accents.

"Psha, 'twas all fancy," returned Sam, but in rather a more cautious voice, "but ye're alwas a getting some strange noshun into that here preshus nob of yourn. I heard nuffin, an' I'm sure my ears is as sharp as yourn at any time. Howsomdever, I s'pose I must satisfy you."

Beaufort, although he was anxious to have his doubts and fears removed, would fain have prevented him, but Sam Filcher was not the man to shrink from trifles, accordingly walking to the door on tip-toe, his companion following him eagerly with his eyes, opened it, and looked out into the passage cautiously, but without observing any one.

"There," said Sam Filcher, returning to the room, and closing the door after him, "I

told yer it vos all fancy. Air yer satisfied now?"

"No," answered Beaufort, "quite the reverse, I'm satisfied that I heard the muttering of voices outside the door just now, we have had listeners, and nothing shall persuade me to the contrary."

"Vhy vot a preshus hobstinate feller yer air, to be sure," returned Filcher, "vos there any signs of any von? Sartinly not."

"They had plenty of time to disappear while we were talking about it," observed Beaufort; "we are surrounded by the most imminent danger, I'm satisfied, and the sooner we depart from hence the better, that is, if we are permitted to do so."

"Permitted to do so," repeated Sam, "I should like to know who'd perwent us, if ve thought proper? But I doesn't, an' yer mustn't, if I say so. So yer may as vell sit yerself down quietly, an' make yerself 'appy. The lush is all gone, so ve must have more, there's ruffin like keeping the game alive, while ye're about it."

Beaufort saw it would be to no purpose to argue further, so he said no more, and Sam Filcher again rang the bell for the attendance of the landlord, and to have the glasses replenished.

The worthy host quickly re-entered the room to receive their orders, and Beaufort could not help thinking that he eyed them with looks of mistrust and suspicion. Sam, however, addressed him with his usual ease and familiarity, and having given another liberal order, the landlord retired from the room without saying a word."

"Did you notice his looks?" interrogated Beaufort, in a low tone of voice.

"Not I," answered Sam, "vot, air yer still quaking? Be keviet, or yer'll do the job for us, if yer don't mind," he added, in a whisper, and looking angrily in the face of his timid and trembling companion; "hush he's coming."

Beaufort feeling the full force of what Sam Filcher had last said, did endeavour to compose himself, and the landlord returned with the drink Sam had ordered, for which the latter having paid on delivery, he again retired silently from the room, closing the door after him.

"Now ve're all right ag'in," said Sam Filcher, raising the teeming jug to his lips, and taking a hearty draught of the welcome beverage it contained, "the landlord of this here crib sells a drop of the right sort, an' no gammon. Now, captain, arn't yer 'appy?"

"No," replied Beaufort, with a gloomy look, "it's impossible to be so, while we are placed in this critical situation."

"Krittycall sitiashun be damned;" replied Sam, hastily, "ye're on that here subjick

ag'in, are yer? Vot the devil is there to alarm yer?"

"More than you seem to think. I again narrowly watched the looks of the landlord, and although he certainly said nothing, if his suspicions are not aroused, I am much mistaken."

"It's no use talking to yer, I see," replied Filcher, with an angry look, "ye're as hobstinate as a donkey. Howsomdever, I shall not trouble myself any more about yer, but enjoy my blessed self while ve remains here, vether yer thinks proper to do so or not; so here goes."

And so saying he put down his pipe for an instant, and again raising a foaming jug to his lips, nearly emptied it, afterwards taking a gentle stimulant, namely a glass of the strongest whisky.

This seemed to have a most salutary as well as exhilarating effect upon the already exhilarated gentleman, as, in a burst of sudden enthusiasm, he put down his pipe, and broke forth into a vocal display of such extraordinary stentorian power, that, an orchestra composed of fifty wind instruments could scarcely have drowned it.

"Madman!" exclaimed Beaufort, still more alarmed than ever, and starting from his seat; "are you determined to ruin us? to betray us?"

"There sit down and shut up, vill yer," returned Filcher, "ye're much more likely to do that here b'sness, by the vay as ye're going on than myself. Vhy the devil din't yer lush and smoke, and do anything else to henjoy yerself, like another rashnal hindividual, while yer've the hoppertunity?—It's only for life."

Beaufort trembled for the consequences, —as they were likely to be—of this rash and reckless conduct of Sam Filcher, but he knew well that it would be as useless to attempt to check him, remonstrate with, or persuade him, as to endeavour to change the Falls of Niagara into a calm and pellucid stream, he was again compelled to submit to the torturing annoyance in silence, and with an expression of countenance, which fully shewed the disgust and even horror of his feelings, but it was entirely lost upon his infamous associate, or, at the most, only eliciting from him a coarse laugh, or some observations of derision.

The fears which Beaufort from the first had entertained, that the landlord's suspicions as to the real characters of himself and Sam Filcher, were aroused, and that the muttering sounds he fancied he had heard outside of the door of the room in which they were sitting, was not a delusion of the senses, still held a predominant place in his mind, and he felt as if being upon the threshold of a goal, every instant that they remained

where they were, and longed to be safely away.

But Sam Filcher was, or affected to be perfectly happy and confident, and continued to enjoy himself after his own peculiar fashion, without the least restraint, diversifying his amusements, or rather dividing them between drinking, smoking, snatches of song, and getting up occasionally to indulge himself in a few flash steps—in which the toe and the heel, a peculiar distortion of the ankle joints, and an *ad libitum* formed the principal features—accompanying the same with a whistle.

And thus the daring scoundrel continued for more than an hour longer, putting the unhappy Beaufort on the rack,—until at length nearly exhausted by his remarkable vocal and physical exertions somewhat calmed down, and did his *otium cum dignitate* in comparative peace.

"We have remained herel ong enough now and perhaps longer than prudence might suggest, than we should have done," remarked Beaufort, seeing his companion in this mood, and hoping at last to be able to prevail upon him, "it is getting towards evening, and therefore had we not better depart while we probably can do so in safety?"

"No," replied Filcher, replenishing his glass, and refilling his pipe, "don't be in a hurry. Time vos made for slavey's,—hem—Milltown's 'istory of Ilingland;—vot's the use of putting yerself in a fever, when all's as cool and pleasant as a cowcumber?"—

"And of what use is this obstinacy?" interrogated Beaufort, "when delay is fraught with danger, and we have had quite sufficient of both rest and refreshment?"

"Stuff and danger," returned Sam, "ye're alwus a talking of that here, speshly when there's not no 'cashun for it. Bless'd if I don't think yer dreams on't. Oughtn't ve both to be as 'appy as sand boys in this here crib, when ve've got it all to ourselves and there's not no von to hinterrupt us? Asides ve hasn't finished our lush and our bacey yet, and it's kevite time enuff for us to talk about hampitatin our preshus timber when ve've done that here. Vot makes yer so very fidgetty, Captain?"

"The usual frequenters of this house may be here presently, as it draws towards evening," replied Beaufort, "and then even you must admit, there would be danger. There might be some of those among the number from whom we so recently escaped."

"And vot of that?" demanded Sam, "they've no 'cashun to see us, and if they did, jist yer keep up yer pluck a little bit, ould Sam Filcher, the Spig of Myrtle vill be on to his vork, and if ve don't beat the ole caboose on 'em, and eat 'em artervards, vhy, say as how I'm no gemman."

"Psha," ejaculated Beaufort, impatiently, "you talk ridiculously, Sam; what could we do, probably opposed to numbers? We experienced enough of that this morning, I should think. Oh! see," he added in an almost breathless voice, and pointing fearfully to the window, upon which the last rays of the setting sun were at that moment shining, "my worst fears and predictions are realised. Your obstinacy and fool-hardiness have destroyed us, Sam; look, look, and convince yourself."

Sam Filcher did indeed look, as his companion directed, and just caught the shadows of two or three men cautiously retiring from the window, at which they appeared to have been watching; but they were gone in an instant.

"Vell," remarked Sam, "arter all, I don't see as how there's so much to be alarmed at. They may be only a passing by on their b'sness, and not going to stop here, and if they vos to do so, and vos to see us, they might know nuffin of us, and so there'd be nuffin to fear."

"I had a distinct view of their countenances," said Beaufort, in a low and tremulous voice, grasping the wrist of Sam Filcher, and half looking towards the room door, "and in one of them I recognised the features of the sturdy waggoner, whom you were so foolish as to insult this morning."

"Yer don't mean that here?"

"I'm positive of it, and also that his eye caught mine."

"If that here's the case," said Sam, putting down his pipe in haste, rising from his seat, and putting on his hat, "its my hopinun that it'd be hadwisable to step it at once, without any more bother; not as I fears a hundred bum'kins like that here vag'ner."

"Hark!" said Beaufort, with a look of terror, and still grasping the wrist of Filcher, "I hear footsteps approaching cautiously along the passage. We are too late, we cannot escape."

"Valker!" returned Sam, coolly, and deliberately walking to the door;—"I'll see about that here. Don't alarm yerself. Here's a key and a bolt inside here, wery handy, so that'll stop ther hentrance this here way."

"Quick! quick! they're coming!"

"Don't flurry yerself," whispered Sam, as he securely locked and bolted the door;—"that's the ticket. Now for the vinder, that's the vay that ve must make ourselves secure. There they air;—kick and thump away, my flowers."

He stepped hastily to the window, as he spoke, dragging Beaufort—who was trembling violently, and considered their chance of escape very small indeed—after him.

"Fust, though," said Filcher, in a low

tone, scarcely above a whisper, then cautiously and silently raising the window, "to see that all's safe outside; "if it arn't, vhy ve must fight our vay, that here's all about it, captain."

The noise at the door became more violent, and it was evident that the persons, whoever they were, were trying to force it, so that there was no time to be lost.

Sam Filcher looked hastily out at the window, and expressed by his looks as well as his words, his satisfaction.

"All right," he said, "kim along, captain, now or niver, sharp's the vord, and kevick's the moshun."

Sam Filcher stepped lightly and quickly from the window as he spoke, and Beaufort, as the reader may be sure, lost no time in following him, but had scarcely done so, when the landlord, and the waggoner—for Beaufort was perfectly correct in what he had stated—forced the door, and burst hastily into the room, followed by two or three others, and they were by no means surprised that Filcher and Beaufort were not in the room.

"The rascals were rayther too sharp for us," said the landlord, "and have escaped by the wiudow. It's a pity that some of you did not wait outside in readiness for them, but they cannot have got far in a few minutes, and if we're quick, we shall be sure to catch 'em."

"Dang 'em," said the waggoner, who was one of the most eager amongst them, "I know'd they wur thieves an' sassinators by the cut of 'em, an' if I don't do my best to cotch 'em, my neame be not Diggorry Dugberry. Come along, my lads."

He hurried out at the window as he spoke followed by the landlord and the others, but Filcher and Beaufort had made the best use of the time, and were no where to be seen.

"The fellows have hid themselves in some hole or corner, I dare say," remarked the worthy host, "we had better be cautious, my friends, for should the villains happen to be armed, which is not at all unlikely, they might do some serious mischief. I think it would be as well to abandon the pursuit after all, rather than run the risk; they'll not long escape the gallows, I reckon, if there be law an' justice in the country."

"That be vera true, Measter Styles," coincided the the burly waggoner, "but whoy didn't ye bring them two large horse-pistols that ye do always have placed over your mantle-piece, wi' ye? They would ha' g'ien 'em summat, I reckon, if we'd only seen 'em."

"Lor' love ye," replied the landlord, "them pistols are only meant to frighten dishonest folk by the sight of them. They have not been loaded, to my certain knowledge for

more than ten years, and I've got nothing in the house to load them with."

The waggoner and his companions laughed, and after going forward a few yards, and looking as far as their eyes could penetrate around them, without any signs of those whom they sought, they took the landlord's advice, abandoned the pursuit, and returned into the house.

This, as may be imagined, was a great relief to Sam Filcher and Beaufort—particularly the latter—who had, fortunately for themselves, found a safe place of concealment near the spot where the landlord and his friends were standing, and had overheard every word they uttered,

At one time the fears of Beaufort were so great, that he was in danger of betraying them, but Filcher grasped his arm significantly, and which, he perfectly understanding, prevented him.

They watched their enemies enter the house, but it was not till several minutes after their departure that they ventured forth from their hiding place, and it was then with the greatest caution and trepidation that they did so.

As far as their eyes could penetrate, however, they could not see anything to excite their alarm, and after walking some distance from the tavern, they struck into a bye-road, which led towards the sea-coast, from which they were a far shorter distance than they imagined.

The sea-coast about Scarborough, at the time of which we write, was much infested with smugglers, who carried on a prosperous trade, and seemed indeed to set the law almost at defiance.

They had secret caverns among the rocks and cliffs, in which they stowed away the fruits of their lawless traffic, until they had the opportunity of otherwise disposing of them, and assembled together at times to drink, smoke, carouse, sing, joke, swear, quarrel, and otherwise enjoy themselves after their own fashion.

To one of these caverns we shall have occasion more particularly to refer in the next chapter—

CHAPTER CLI.

WHAT FURTHER HAPPENED TO SAM FILCHER AND BEAUFORT.

Sam and Beaufort proceeded on their way, at a quick pace, for some distance, without stopping to look behind them or to exchange a word without each other, and it was not long before they had got far away from the place where they had again been threatened with so much danger, and from the effects of

which the nervous Beaufort had not yet entirely recovered.

The dark shadows of evening had now fallen on all around, and the hour was calm and silent, broken in upon only at intervals by the gentle murmuring of the wind.

The road, as has been before stated, which Filcher and Beaufort were traversing, was a bye one, and even at that early hour of the evening, no one was to be seen, a circumstance which they considered fortunate, and as altogether favourable to their ultimate escape.

"So ve've done the knowing vons ag'in, captain, yer see, in spite of all yer fears," remarked Sam Filcher, suddenly stopping beneath the branches of an old tree which grew by the road-side, "I knowed ve should if ve only hacted visely."

"Don't make too sure of it yet," replied Beaufort, for the danger is by no means past. These men, their suspicions being aroused, and hearing of the reward which is offered for the apprehension of two men answering the description of ourselves, will probably lose no time in making the circumstances known to the proper authorities, when such steps will be doubtless taken which must ultimately lead to our capture."

"They've got to catch us though," said Sam, emphatically; "an' it's wery strange to me if it von't take 'em all their time to do it."

"I'm afraid," observed Beaufort, "that, notwithstanding you appear to be so sanguine upon the subject, you will find yourself most disagreeably disappointed."

"Shall I?"

"Yes; it was nothing else but obstinate madness on your part to persist that we should remain so long at the inn from which we have just escaped, especially after what I had observed."

"I should have been a fool to leave sich good fare in a hurry, 'specially when I didn't know when I should get any more. I feels hinwigorated now, an' fit for anything; so, come along, an' let's have no more grumbling about it."

"Sam," said Beaufort, looking timidly about, to see that there was no one approaching, "I feel more tired of and disgusted with this wretched life than ever."

"Do yer? Then I don't; in fact, it's full of bustle an' hadwentur', it suits me, an' I keвите henjoys it."

"You're a reckless, thoughtless fool, Sam," said Beaufort, "but you will awake from your dream of folly some of these times, and that, perhaps, much sooner than you now seem to expect, and no doubt that your ideas will then undergo a material change."

"Indeed," returned Sam Filcher, scorn-

fully, "whoever told yer yer vos a profit? I'm not a going to be frightened by anything as yer can say, I can tell yer, so yer may as vell say nuffin. Ve must make the best use of our time while ve've got the chance, so put yer best leg for'ard and come on, captain."

"Whither are we going now?"

"How the devil should I know? Ve shall find that out afore long, I dare say, an' ve must take our chance. This here's a nice pleasant road to travel along, an' ve're got it all to ourselves, so that here's lucky."

"Hark!" ejaculated Beaufort, looking cautiously round and listening.

"Now vot's hup?" demanded Sam Filcher hastily.

"I thought I heard the sound of voices and approaching footsteps," answered Beaufort.

"An' vot if yer did?" returned Filcher, "is no von to travel this here road but ourselves, d'yer think?"

"No; but had we not better be upon our guard, and stand aside and watch those who are approaching, before ve venture to reveal ourselvss?"

"No," replied Sam Filcher, "the best vay is to put a bold face upon the b'sness, an' meet 'em like men, whosomdever they air, for should they find us sneaking and trying to hide ourselves, they would nat'rally suspect as how ve're not of much account wouldn't they?"

Beaufort could not but admit the truth of this, and returned no answer. But his fears at the approach of the persons, whoever they were—for both himself and Sam Filcher now distinctly heard them, although owing to a winding in the road, they could not see them—were by no means abated, and he listened anxiously to the sounds and looked fearfully in the direction from which they seemed to proceed; but at length, much to his satisfaction, as may be supposed, they moved off in another direction, and gradually died away altogether.

"There," interrogated Sam, "air yer 'appy now? Didn't I tell yer it would be all right, an' that there vos nuffin to fear? They air only some trav'lers like ourselves, I dare say. Ve can't hexpect to travel, and not to meet with not no von on the road. All as ve've got to do is to mind vot ve're about, to make ouselves agreeable to any von as ve may come across, and who's to suspect two sich 'spectable an' good-looking chaps as yer an' I am, I should like to know?"

"Bah!" exclaimed Beaufort, sternly and impatiently, "it's only a waste of time to talk to such a man as you."

"Is it? then I would advise yer to keep that here preshus breath of yourn, if yer can till it's all taken out of yer in rayther a clandestine manner some fine morning or t'other about the roll time."

"Sam — Sam," remonstrated Beaufort, with a look of cowardly terror.

"Ah," returned Filcher, with a malicious grin, "I thought as how that here would touch them here sensible feelings of yourn."

"Torturer," groaned the unhappy Beaufort, "you seem to take a savage delight to mock and deride me."

"Vell, an' whose fault is it, I should like to know?" asked Sam, "haven't I told yer ag'in an' ag'in that it's no use of yer throwing out yer snacks at me, for ye're sure to get the worst on it?"

Beaufort needed not to be told this, for he knew too well from woful experience, so he said nothing that could aggravate the scoundrel to any further observations of a similar description, in fact, they walked on to some distance farther in perfect silence, when Sam suddenly said—

"If I arn't mistaken, an it's not often as I am, this here road leads to the sea-coast."

"And what do we want near the sea-coast?" asked Beaufort, hastily.

"Vhy, it might be handy for us to take a trip over to the kontynent, if ve felt hinclined to do so," replied Filcher.

"Yes," returned Beaufort, with a half sarcastic grin, "and it might be handy too for some of the coast guard to lay hold of us."

"Damn the coast-guard," replied Sam, "vot have ve got to fear from 'em? Howsomdever, ve must chance all about that here; this is the road as I shall pursue, an' not no other."

Beaufort offered no further objection, which could have no other effect than to excite the anger of his obstinate companion, so on they went at the top of their speed, certainly feeling their strength much recruited by the rest and refreshment of which they had so liberally partaken at the inn.

Sam Filcher amused himself in his usual manner, under circumstances of the most trying and dangerous nature, and Beaufort was left to the full and uninterrupted enjoyment of his own thoughts, which the reader must be well aware were not of the most pleasant description, especially after the many narrow escapes they had recently experienced from apprehension, into which he felt convinced the headstrong bravado and foolish obstinacy of Filcher would shortly hurry them, and the awful and ignominious fate which then awaited them was quite certain, and was sufficient to make even the stoutest heart tremble at the bare contemplation.

The road, as has been before alluded to, was winding and irregular, but was flanked on either side by romantic scenery, which had a most pleasing effect upon those who had the mind to appreciate its beauties, and to admire them, which it is almost needless to say that Sam Filcher and his companion had not.

The farther they advanced on their way, the brisk and freshening breeze that was wafted to them, and other signs equally powerful, convinced them that Sam had not been mistaken in the idea he had formed, but that they were really approaching the sea-coast, which Beaufort looked upon with his usual doubt and dismal foreboding.

It seemed most extraordinary that, although they had been travelling more than an hour and a half, and, at the speed at which they had proceeded, had traversed a considerable portion of ground, they should not have encountered a single individual on their way; in fact, it would appear that the road—although the beautiful scenery which rose at, every step, to the eye from either side, and has either been described or alluded to, rendered it anything but a cheerless one—was carefully avoided by pedestrians and others, as if there was something mysterious and awful connected with it, and which the solemn and almost unearthly stillness which rested upon it, excepting when at intervals by the wind, seemed to impress more forcibly and painfully upon the imagination.

"Vell," remarked Sam Filcher—for it was impossible for that facetious and garrulous scoundrel to restrain his loquacity for any length of time—"ve have had it all to ourselves, anyhow, an' it'd seem as if the road vos made for our haccomydashun only on sich a spec' as that ve're now on to, though it 'ouldn't be very profitable if ve vos arter 'cuniary b'siness. Cheer up, captain, I'm kevite sartin as there's nuffin to make you look so gloomy about now."

"Sam," replied Beaufort, in the bewildered state of mind in which he found himself, scarcely knowing what he said, "I do not half like the idea of venturing near the sea-coast. Danger seems to threaten us there."

"Vos there ever sich a cove afore?" said Sam, with a look of contempt. "I don't know vot to do vith yer, I'm sure Where air ve to go? since ewery place seems to frighten yer in purfict fits at the thoughts of it."

"Filcher," returned Beaufort, "notorious as we have become—detested as our crimes have made us, there is no place to which we may go where we shall not be known, or surrounded by the most imminent danger. Our career is nearly at an end, I see it clearly, and it is impossible that we can long avoid

the shameful but merited, richly merited fate which most undoubtedly awaits us."

"I see yer determined to get my monkey hup," returned Sam Filcher, with a fearful oath, "yer seem to have made up yer mind to ruffel my am'able temper, by these here stupid thoughts an' noshuns, an' the manner in which yer raps 'em out, an' if yer does, I can't say vot the konsekenses might be. Yer knows vot I am?"

"Too well," answered Beaufort, with a shudder, and averting his looks, "oh, would that I had never known you at all."

"Now," said the ruffian Filcher, reproachfully, and looking as if his feelings, so sensitive, were greatly wounded, "now if that here ain't the very height of hingatitood, I don't know what is. I feels 'urt—wery much 'urt, an' yer've cut my preshus 'art to the kevore."

"Treat not my words with derision," said Beaufort, "for, depend upon it, I mean what I say."

"Yer does?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm stunned. Why, vot would have become of yer, if it hadn't a been for me? Haven't I stuck to yer like a leech, never left yer for amminute? Haven't I been a father an' mother, an' a sister an' a brother to yer all through the piece? an' this is the return as yer makes me for it, is it? Vell, I never, if I arn't keвите spificated, an' that here's all about it."

"Hardened, desperate, villain," Beaufort could not help observing, "guily wretch even as I am, it shocks my ears, and fills me with the greatest disgust and horror to hear you talk."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the incorrigible, and insensible Sam Filcher, derisively; "vell, this here is von of the richest jokes I ever heard. Brayvo, captain, I never know'd yer to come hout 'alf so vell as this afore, and yer may as vell go the 'ole 'ogg, brissels and all, while yer 'bout it."

"I can endure this no longer," said the wretched Beaufort, worked up to a pitch of the utmost excitement.

"But yer must;" retorted Sam, fiercely, and with an equal savage look, while he grasped the arm of Beaufort with a violence which shewed, if anything was required to do so, that he meant what he said, and was determined to carry out his threats to the very letter; "yer must; and yer can't help yerself, as I've told yer haffen enuff afore. I see, I've guv yer too much hindulgence; spoilt yer, let yer have it all yer own vay, and this is vot I gets for my feckshunal care and 'tenshun. But I must take yer down a peg or two, that here's all 'bout it."

"Filcher," exclaimed Beaufort, "what a bitter, what a cruel mockery is this,"

"Nuffin of the sort," returned the former, coolly, "I means every blessed vord vot I ses, and more. I told yer as how yer'd get my mettle hup, vith yer preshus nonsense yer've done so, and now yer must take it all as it comes, vether yer likes it or not. Why, if it hedn't a been for me, who've vatch'd over yer like a blessed babbly, yer'd have been topp'd long ago."

Beaufort looked at the abominable scoundrel imploringly, and trembled in every limb, but could not utter a word; and Sam having again laughed maliciously and scornfully, once more grasping his unfortunate and distracted victim by the wrist, he forced him along, the latter being now entirely powerless to offer any resistance.

The morn had hitherto not shown her bright face, although the night was so beautiful, and countless stars had gemmed the clear sky; but it now appeared and added the greatest lustre to the scene.

Pity that the moon's chaste silvery beams should ever shine on wretches so utterly depraved and worthless!

Suddenly Sam Filcher stopped, as they came to a turning on the road, and looking earnestly before him, said—

"Ah, I sees summat now as tells me I vos keвите right in vot I thought. Mind old Doleful, jist yer open yer eyes, and see vether yer can see clear."

Beaufort did gaze in the direction in which Filcher pointed, and saw to what he alluded in an instant.

"Now then, vot d'yer see there?" demanded Sam.

"Rocks and cliffs they appear to be," replied Beaufort, in sullen tones.

"Wery much like 'em, don't yer think so?" interrogated Sam; "an' hark; blessed if I can't hear the murmuring of the waves."

"Yes, we are fast approaching the sea, there can be no doubt of that," remarked Beaufort, with a dissatisfied look, "and what of it?"

"Ve shall see; anything for a change," replied Sam.

"The best change we can take," returned Beaufort, half sarcastically, "will be to drown ourselves, and thus rid society of two such miscreants."

"Valker!" replied Sam, "I'm not a going to be sich a preshus fool as to foller yer hadvice, not no how. It's too cold to try the experiment, asides, I'm not in the humour to-night. So kim along, an' ve shall see vot ve shall see."



CHAPTER CLII.

AN UNFRIENDLY RECEPTION.

THEY could not be mistaken; the huge cliffs, and lofty rocks, rose clearly and distinctly before them (a short distance from the termination of the road) in the broad glow of the silver moonlight, and they could plainly hear the murmuring sound of the waves as they dashed upon the pebbly beach.

In a deep cavern in one of the rocks, (with an opening on to the beach), formed by the hand of nature, for it was quite certain that human hands could never have accomplished the task, were assembled at the hour of which we are now writing, as rough and hardy a lot of men, as could

well be imagined; men whose determined features plainly shewed that there was no enterprise, however desperate, which they were not prepared to undertake, that there was no danger however appalling from which they would shrink, or which could daunt them.

They were smugglers, and were heartily enjoying themselves according to their own rough taste, having lately had an extraordinary run of good luck, and defrauded the excise of no little amount.

The bright moonbeams danced upon the broad waters of the mighty and boundless ocean, (of which there was an extensive view from the opening in the cavern before mentioned), and the waves as they dashed upon the sands, or lashed the sides of the cliffs and rocks, stretching far into the

sea, seemed to be murmuring forth "some fairy song," keeping their revels with the sea gods and mermaids.

The scene in the cavern was one of the most singular, and even picturesque description; round a rudely constructed table (which, however, sufficiently answered its purpose,) in the centre, the smugglers were seated, most of them on empty casks, smoking and drinking extravagantly; laughing boisterously, singing snatches of songs, appropriate to their lawless calling occasionally, and indulging in vulgar jokes, far from being fit for "ears polite."

They were all of them well armed, and were evidently quite capable and fully prepared to defend themselves to the last, in case of any sudden surprise.

There was no lamp in the cavern, for it was not required, the moon always throwing sufficient light on their dark transactions, and the light of a lamp might form a beacon to those whom they had no particular wish to encounter.

Such was the cavern in the rock, and its inmates, on this particular evening (the one on which Sam and his companion came in sight of the rocky scene), the Smugglers were unusually merry, for of late they had, as has been before stated, been remarkably successful, and only the night before had "run" an immense quantity of spirits ashore, without the slightest obstruction.

"Come, my lads," said one of them, a rough, but withall, good-humoured looking fellow, "fill your glasses, and let's keep the game alive; for what's the use of finching when there's plenty of good drink for us all to swim in?—Here's success to free trade, and damn the excise."

"Well said, Griff," remarked another, "we must be ungrateful scoundrels if we didn't follow your advice, after the run of good luck we've had for weeks past. The Government may not expect every man to do *the duty*, but we do it to some tune, and glory in it. Lads, you've heard Griff Halder's toast, and, of course, you'll drink it with all your hearts."

"Aye, aye," shouted the whole of the smugglers in a breath, and raising their glasses towards their lips—"Success to free trade, and damn the excise!"

The most uproarious plaudits followed this toast, and the boisterous mirth of the smugglers increased every moment.

It was at this time that Sam Filcher and his companion, having wound their way down among the rocks on to the beach, approached to within a short distance of the smugglers' cave, and the sounds of their boisterous mirth reached their ears, startling and alarming Beaufort, but excit-

ing a lively feeling of surprise and curiosity in Sam.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, "vots hup now? Vots the next adventur' I vonders? Comp'ny's vaitin' us, an' some of the right sort, too, seemin'ly, for they're makin' preshus merry."

"They're smugglers, or some other desperate characters, no doubt," said Beaufort.

"So much the better," returned Sam Filcher, "so are ve desp'rate characters, ain't ve? an' so they're more likely to giv us a hearty welcome. Come along, Captain, they've got a snuggerly somewhere in that here rock, so ve'll jist take the liberty of hinderdoooin ourselves to em. I dare say they'll be delighted to see us, as they ought to be."

"Stay, rash fool!" said Beaufort, with a look of fear and remonstrance, "do you know what you are about to do?"

"In course I does; havn't I said it?"

"You seem resolved to hurry us both to destruction. Should these men behold us, they would be almost sure to take us for spies, and serve us accordingly. Let us hasten from here, while we have the opportunity of doing so without being discovered."

"Not I," said Filcher, determinedly, "catch me at doing such a foolish thing when there's plenty of lush in perspectif, an' jolly good comp'ny into the bargain."

"You may do as you like," remarked Beaufort, holding back, "I'll go no farther."

"Won't yer?"

"No, if you're mad enough to run your head into danger, when there's no occasion, you shall not drag me with you."

"Indeed! So yer hobbecks?"

"I do."

"Vell then, I hinsist," returned Sam, pulling a knife from his pocket, "an' if ye're obst'nat, vhy, yer might chance to have a hinch or two of this in that hare preshus carckiss o'yourn. Come along, I say, an' not no finchin', if yer've any wallee for yerself."

Sam grasped the wrist of the unhappy Beaufort, as he spoke, and forced him towards the rock, from which the sounds that had attracted their attention proceeded, and ascending to a more elevating part of the beach, the opening in the rock, which commanded a view of the interior of the cavern, suddenly burst upon their astonished gaze, and they beheld the smugglers in the midst of their carousal.

Beaufort still hesitated, and his fears were by no means diminished, on finding that his surmises were correct.

But Sam Filcher's feelings were very

different, and he gazed at the novel scene before him, with looks of evident satisfaction and expectation.

"Here's a go," he said; chuckling; "vell, this here is pleasant, howsumdever. Vot a nice, comfortibel party, to be sure;—it does von's preshus eyesight good to see 'em. All right, my flowers, we'll be with yer in a jiffy."

"Sam, Sam," said Beaufort, in a low voice, and fixing a look of supplication upon him; "beware what you do, ere 'tis too late. To venture to intrude upon those men, strangers as we are to them, cannot but be attended with the most fearful consequences. Let us away, while there is time to do so."

"Come along, I say," returned Sam Filcher, obstinately, and still retaining his hold of Beaufort's wrist, "d'yer think I'm a goin' to be frightened by yer nonsense?"

He again forced the wretched Beaufort along, and ascending some steps formed out of pieces of the rock, till he came to a level with the entrance to the cave, he coolly and fearlessly popped in his head, and in his usual agreeable and familiar manner, said:

"Good ev'nin' to yer, gemmen, glad to see yer look so jolly."

The smugglers started from their seats in much amazement at this unexpected interruption, and their astonishment was not at all diminished upon beholding the daring Sam Filcher and his trembling companion.

"Ah! spies!" they all exclaimed together, in fierce tones, "death to the intruders!" and in a moment a dozen pistols were levelled at them.

CHAPTER CLIII.

THE RESULT OF THE ADVENTURE.

BEAUFORT shrank back in terror, and would no doubt, if he could have found the opportunity, have taken to immediate flight; but Sam Filcher stood his ground manfully, and exhibited not the least signs of fear, which daring conduct, together with his singular appearance, and the terror evinced by his companion, seemed to disarm the smugglers of much of their ferocity, and, at a signal from Griff Halder, as he had been called, and who appeared to possess authority over them, they dropped their weapons, and Halder and two or three others advanced towards the opening where Sam Filcher and Beaufort stood.

"Come, I say, my flower," observed Sam, reproachfully, and addressing himself to

Griff Halder, "this here's not keville the sort o' velcome as gemmen has a right to hexpee', when they meets vith gemmen. Lor' love yer preshus hinnocence, vhy, ve're not no spies, an' damn them as is, I say."

"We must be better convinced of that before we part from you," said Halder; "at any rate, your appearance here looks suspicious. This way, and give some account of yourselves."

Thus saying, Griff, rather unceremoniously, seized Sam Filcher by the collar with his large, brawny and powerful hand, and lifted him into the cave with as much ease as if he had been a mere infant; while two more of the smugglers did the same for the terrified Beaufort, who had now certainly come to the conclusion that his last moments were at hand.

"Vell," said Sam Filcher, good humouredly, and giving himself a bit of a shake, "that here vos cleverly done, an' not no mistake. Who'd ha' thought that the Sprig o' Myrtle, could ever ha' been grappled so easy? To be sure you air a size or so larger, an' a stun or two heavier than I am, an' I s'pose that here 'counts for it."

The smugglers gathered around them as Sam spoke, and seemed to be perfectly struck with the coolness and nonchalance of the impudent scoundrel, Sam Filcher, while they viewed with unmistakable contempt the trembling fear of his companion, Beaufort, who presented such an extraordinary contrast.

"Now then," said Griff Halder, sternly, after a brief pause, and speaking to Sam, "answer the questions that will be put to you, quickly and truly, if you would not, with this poor miserable looking devil here, your companion, be tossed into the sea, or have a brace of bullets lodged in each of your skulls."

"Come, I say, old feller," remonstrated Sam, but still exhibiting not the least signs of fear, "that is givin' it us rayther stiff, ain't it? Ve wouldn't not thank yer for nayther o' the fayvers yer've jist mentioned."

"There, damn your nonsense," returned Halder, impatiently, placing a pistol in rather unpleasant proximity with Sam's head, while two of the smugglers paid similar attention to the terror-struck Beaufort. "it won't do here. Answer me, and correctly, if you value your life."

"Jist take that ere barker from my ear, then, if yer please," replied Sam, for it causes a verry disagreeabel sensashun. Vot is it yer wants to know?"

"What brought you here?"

"Oh, that here keveshtun is verry soon

answer'd, an' in the most sat'sfact'ry manner. Vot brought me and that here poor cur here? Vell, I'll tell yer; fust our preshus legs, and then haxident, to be sure."

"Beware!"

"Bevare," repeated Sam, not at all alarmed, "in course I shall; an' bevare as yer makes no mistake in this b's'ness; cos my character's as 'spectable as yourn, I reckon."

"This is trifling," said two or three of the smugglers, impatiently.

"Not so trifling, nayther," returned Sam, "yer may as vell kill a feller at vonce, as to try to frighten him to death. Tear away, my toolip, vot's the next keveshtun? Spit it out."

Griff Halder looked at the hardened ruffian for a moment or two with amazement, and could scarcely refrain from laughing.

While Halder was thus examining Filcher, Beaufort was undergoing the same questioning process by the two smugglers who had him in charge, in another part of the cave, to see whether their answers corresponded, and the reader may easily imagine the state of trepidation in which the wretched man was.

"This is but a waste of time, Griff, I consider," said one of the gang, approaching him, and with a threatening look at Sam Filcher, which the latter worthy, however, returned with one of the most superlative contempt and defiance; "its clear that those two fellows have thrust themselves in where they were not wanted, and for some treacherous purpose. There answers are not to be depended upon, and their appearance and manners are assumed, I'll warrant. You know our law is death to those who seek to pry into our actions, in order that they may betray us into the hands of the land sharks; and why should we spare them? secure them together and commit them at once to the waves: they'll make excellent food for the fishes."

This proposition was received with the greatest demonstrations of approbation by several of the smugglers; it was a critical moment, and the lives of Beaufort and Sam Filcher did indeed seem to hang upon a thread.

"Hold hard, mate," said Sam, speaking to the man who had made the suggestion, but not at all disturbing himself, "it strikes me as how ye're a leetle bit too fast, an' not no mistake. An yer sich a preshus glutton as to vant to sva'ller a man at a mouthful! hat, coat, vestcoat, breeches, buttons, boots, an' all! Yer must be hungry, yer must."

This was spoken in such a manner,—so

coolly and so fearlessly, that it was quite irresistible, and the smugglers laughed heartily, in which Sam Filcher joined, but Beaufort, the cowardly villain Beaufort, the reader may rest assured, did no such thing.

"I'm quite aware, Will Blackfield," said Halder, "what our laws are, and do not require to be reminded of them by any one. When occasion demands it, I will not fail to see them enforced. But we must not be too precipitate, but be convinced before we proceed to act."

"Brayvo!" cried Sam, admiringly, "ye're not a bad sort, arter all."

"We've had enough of this nonsense," observed Halder, impatiently; "so now at once to the business; who are you and your companion?"

"Two of the most preshus thieves and cut-throats unhanged," replied Filcher, "there, vill that satisfy yer?"

Beaufort uttered an exclamation of horror and despair, and covered his face with his hands, swaying his body to and fro with the intensity of his agony.

"Well," said Griff Halder, with a grin, and in answer to Sam Filcher, "that's candid enough, at any rate, and is giving yourselves at the same time a first-rate character."

"In course it is," coincided Sam, "an' in 'spect to character, you an' I, and these here worthy gemmen shall not fall out, I dare say. There's not nuffin like a speakin' the truth; I never told a lie in my life."

"Till now?" suggested one of the smugglers, with a laugh.

"Good, my butter-cup," said Filcher, "yer can take a chalk. Now, old feller, vot else have yer got to say? Let's have it."

"May I take the liberty of inquiring the names of the respectable gentlemen who have honoured us with this visit?" inquired Griff Halder, with mock politeness.

"Cut it, vill yer?" returned Sam, "that here's a kevestian I vould much rayther decline to answer."

"But you must."

"Oh, vell, if I must, I must; I'm not wery pertikler. Vell, then, to begin, that here poor devil, my pal, vot's a fright'nin' hisself into fits, vos vonce Captain Beaufort, of the hussars, an' a reg'ler toph; an' as for myself, I'm not no other than the celly-brayted an' renowned ould Sam Filcher, the Sprig o' Myrtle, an' the pride of Westminster, him as fit the noto-riotus Hookem Snivey, the Game Bantam of Chick-lane!"

"And for the apprehension of yourself and your companion, there is a reward offered; is it not so?" said Halder.

Filcher returned no answer, but affected

to whistle cheerfully; but Beaufort groaned aloud, and could not contain himself.

"Come," said Griff Halder, "it's no use trying to shirk the question, Master Filcher; I've got one of the bills in my pocket, and the persons of yourself and your companion exactly correspond with the description. Shall I show it you?"

"No, no," answered Sam, "I've not the least curios'ty upon the subjeck. But, I say, old feller, yer wouldn't go for to holler bout it, would yer, jist for the sake of the tin, eh?"

"Well, that all depends upon yourselves," replied Griff; "I am inclined to believe what you have said, and so are my mates, I believe."

"Then, jolly good luck to you and them," said Filcher.

"From the moment you leave this cave, mark me," continued Halder, "an unseen eye will be ever upon you and your companion, you will be constantly watched wherever you may go, and should the least suspicion arise that you have deceived us, and that you contemplate treachery, that moment, depend upon it, will consign you to a dungeon, and shortly to the gallows. If you remain faithful, you may escape for ever for us."

"Come, now," said Sam Filcher, approvingly, "that here's vot I calls wery fair."

"Do you agree to the terms?"

"In course I does."

"And your friend, the Captain?"

"Oh, he's nobody, he must do as I tells him."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Griff. "Are you all satisfied?" he added, addressing himself to the smugglers.

"We are," replied the latter unanimously. Beaufort felt a heavy weight removed from his breast, still he was far from easy or satisfied.

"Hurror!" shouted Sam Filcher, "that here's vot I calls b's'ness. So now that's all settled, we're all as right as if we'd known each other for fifty year?"

"Yes," answered Griff Halder, who seemed to be rather amused with the vulgar humour of the facetious scoundrel, Sam Filcher, while he looked upon the wretched Beaufort with the greatest contempt; "where are you going to night?"

"No where in pertickler," replied Sam, "ye means to stop here, if yer likes."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Griff, good humouredly, "the worst of it is you're so very bashful, master Sam Filcher."

"Can't help it," returned Sam, "I s'pose I vos born so. But this here is sich anice comfortable snuggery o' yourn, and so

retired that I think I could pass a wery happy night in it."

"Well," observed Griff Halder, "as you seem tired, you and your companion can remain here to night, and partake of our cheer; but at the first dawn of day you must depart and remember well what I have said to you."

"No fear of that, my flower," said Sam.

"If you value your own neck, and that of the Captain, you will not fail to do so," said Griff; "now then, as that business is arranged, apparently in a satisfactory manner to all parties, take your seats at the table and make yourselves at home."

Sam required no second invitation to comply with this request, but walking up to the festive board, he shook hands with the smugglers all round, as cordially and as familiarly as if they had been on the most intimate and friendly terms for half a century; then took his seat among them at the table, filled himself a glass and a pipe, and was quickly enjoying himself with as much spirit as the most jovial of them.

As for Beaufort, who felt as if he was in purgatory, and gave way to all kinds of extravagant fears. After much persuasion, and not till he was moved by the derision of some of the smugglers, he crawled reluctantly to the table, and was with difficulty prevailed upon to partake of the intoxicating drink that was placed in such abundance before him; but, fearful of offending the smugglers, and of exposing himself to their coarse ridicule, if, indeed, nothing worse, he did at last comply, with the best grace he could, even at times attempting to appear cheerful, a most melancholy attempt indeed.

"Vell," remarked Sam Filcher, replenishing his glass for the third time, and with a most agreeable smile upon his countenance, "this is summat like, an' no mistake. Here's jolly good luck to yer all, gemmen, an' success to all yer hundertakers—hundertakings, I means."

This toast was highly applauded, and done full honour to.

"Vot a blessin' it is," continued Sam, sentimentally, after a pause, "vot a blessin' it is, arter the fatigs an' cares of the day is over, to fall into good comp'ny, who knows how to henjoy themselves in a rashnal vay, as ve air doin' now. Ah! I've hoften experienc'd it, but never like the present moment. Yer do me proud, gemmen."

The smugglers seemed duly to appreciate the feeling with which this was spoken, and expressed themselves accordingly.

Sam Filcher hid his blushes in another tumbler of Hollands.

"Ah!" he observed, smacking his lips,

and his cheeks and nose glowing again from the strong effects of the spirit he had imbibed, "that's some of the right sort, an' no gammon, and seems even to make the 'art of my pal, the Captain, warm, an' it's not a trifle as vill do that here, I can tell yer. Gemmen, if it wouldn't be hintrudin', would yer like to hear a bit of a stave?"

Of course that kind offer met with the unanimous approbation and assent of the company, and Sam Filcher immediately set off in his very best and most popular style, and accomplished his task in a manner that drew forth the most rapturous applause from his delighted and discriminating audience.

In fact, the smugglers found Sam Filcher (at least according to their taste), one of the most pleasant and jovial companions they had met with for some time. He sang, whistled, danced, joked, swore, related marvellous adventures that he had encountered, and many more that he had never met with, and all with that spirit and vivacity so peculiar to himself, that it had the most telling effect; and it seemed as though his fund of humour was quite inexhaustible.

But at length the lateness of the hour warned them to break up. Some of the smugglers left the cave, and the others stretched themselves on the earth, and sunk off to sleep as well as they could, Sam and Beaufort following their example, while one was left to keep watch in case of any threatened danger.

CHAPTER CLIV.

ANOTHER NARROW ESCAPE.

NOTWITHSTANDING the rudeness of his pallet (for he had nothing but a pilot-jacket to rest upon), Sam Filcher, being "charged to the muzzle" with drink, went soon sound off to sleep, as did also the smugglers, the one who had to keep watch taking his seat near the opening to the beach, and passing away the dreary and tedious hours in the best manner he could, namely, between drinking and smoking.

Beaufort, however, was too unhappy in his mind to sleep, except at intervals; and when he did so, his imagination was haunted by dreams that excited his utmost terror.

Every day, almost every hour, produced some alarming event, and which all tended to make him believe that the crisis of their fate was fast approaching, and which the headstrong and fool-hardy conduct of Sam Filcher was certainly well calculated to precipitate.

He did, however, at last become somewhat more composed, so that he was enabled to sleep pretty soundly, notwithstanding the roughness of his accommodation.

They were rather abruptly and unceremoniously aroused by the smugglers shaking them violently and shouting in their ears, and starting up, they then perceived that, although it was scarcely daylight, the smugglers were all bustling about, Griff Halder, who had left the cave, after they had terminated their carousal on the night before, among the rest.

"Vot a pity 'tis," remarked Sam Filcher, rubbing his eyes and yawning, "that a man should be disturbed from a comfortable snooze, an' when he is right bang in the midst of sich pleasant dreams. I'd almost giv' my 'ed an' shoulders for another forty vinks or so."

"Day breaks over the ocean," replied Griff Halder, "and we must not loiter here; so you and your friend Master Filcher, can partake of what refreshment you like, and then you must depart."

"Vell," returned Sam, in a tone of regret, "if it must be so it must, I 'spose, though I must say, as I don't half like the thought of partin' from sich good comp'ny."

"The best of friends must part, you know," said Griff, "and I only wish that you and the Captain here, may never fare worse than you have with me and my mates."

"Thank yer, Master Halder," returned Filcher, "yer've sарved us fust rate, an' I shall never forget it."

"There," said Griff, impatiently, "there's enough of that. We're rough spun fellows, like yourself, you know, and we don't want a lot of palaver about thanks. For what you've had (if you only keep your promise to me and my mates, and if you're wise you will be careful to do so) you're heartily welcome, and should be again, if ever you were to come this way and find us here. Will you and your friend the Captain take a glass or two at parting?"

"Ye're a trump," answered Sam, flatteringly, "with all my 'art, my buttercup, an' I can answer for the Captain."

Sam's wishes were complied with, and he drank nearly a pint of the strongest spirit off at a draught, as if it had been merely so much water, while Beaufort, who felt heart-sick, and whose head ached from the effects of that which he had been almost compelled to drink but a few hours before, scarcely moistened his lips, and felt anxious to begone, while there was yet no one about.

"Ah!" observed Sam, having teemed off the contents of another glass, and smacking his lips, that is some of the right

sort, an' no gammon. Blest if I shall ever get the taste of it out of my mouth."

"I would advise you not take any more of it," remarked Griff, "or you'll not be able to travel far to day, I can tell you."

"Vell," replied Sam Filcher, "in course I shall foller yer friendly advice, though I'm pretty vell season'd. I say, Master Griff, yer haven't got a stray flask or two o' that have yer, to put in the pocket for myself an' my pal to revive our preshus selves on the road, eh?"

Griff Halder laughed, and immediately supplied the modest and insinuating Sam with his wants, and he again urged upon him the necessity of departing without any more delay.

"Which is the best vay to get out of the riddle of these here rocks an' cliffs?" inquired Sam, "for ve don't vant to travel along the beach.

"I will conduct you," answered Griff, "but you must be quick."

Sam thanked him, then shaking hands most heartily with the other smugglers, and bidding them good by, he and Beaufort followed Griff Halder from the cave.

The broad waters of the deep now presented a splendid sight, the golden sun seeming to rise from its bosom, and even Beaufort and his more ignorant and brutal-minded associate in crime could not help admiring it.

But Griff Halder did not give them much time to contemplate the scene, but hurried them up a steep and perilous ascent, which led to the summit of the cliffs, which they gained after much labour, but in safety.

"There," said Griff, "you're all right now, and I must leave you. Farewell, remember the promise you have made, and the certain consequences that will follow, if you break it."

Sam Filcher was about to make some reply, but before he could do so, Griff had left them, and was again descending the rock, with an ease and speed which was perfectly astonishing.

Sam Filcher and Beaufort watched him till he was hidden from their view, and then the former observed:—

"There goes vun of the best fellers as ever vos, and jolly good luck to him, I vouldn't ha' missed makin' his ackquaintence, an' that of his mates for the world. Vot d' yer say, Captain?"

"Say," repeated Beaufort, with his usual dissatisfied look, "why that I wish we had never seen them."

"In course yer does, I should vunder if yer didn't; yer allus goes by the rule of conteraries, yer does. Yer've got those blessed fears on yer agin, have yer?"

"And is there not good cause for fear?" demanded Beaufort, "lightly though you may pretend to treat it?"

"No; how d'yer make it out?"

"Have you not madly revealed our names and characters to the smugglers, and thus placed us in their power and at their mercy?—Do you not remember what the man who has just quitted us, said,—namely, "that an unseen eye would be constantly watching us wherever we went, and that at any time we could be consigned to a dungeon, and from there to the gallows."

"Yes," returned Sam, "but that vos only if ve broke our promise, an' gave any signs of a betrayin' 'em, which in course ve should not be sich flats as to do."

"And think you that men of their character," interrogated Beaufort, "can easily withstand the temptation of the large reward which is offered for our apprehension?—It is not at all unlikely that long before this the officers of justice have been apprized of our whereabouts, and that before we have proceeded far, we shall find ourselves in their clutches."

"Vot damned nonsense it is to talk like that here," said Sam angrily; "how the devil d' yer think that the smugglers can show a head in this here b'sness, when they're vanted theirselves?"

"They may have some means of betraying us," replied Beaufort, "without being seen in the matter themselves. Sam, I feel wretched."

"Vell, yer air a pumpkin," said Filcher, contemptuously, "allus a puttin' yerself in a fever 'bout nuffin. There, don't cry, Vos there ivir sich a preshus hannymal seen afore?"

"Sam," said Beaufort, with a most serious look, "you'll awake from the mad dream that at present deludes your senses before long, depend upon it."

"There, shut up," said Sam impatiently, "an' let's get on our vay, in the fresh of the early mornin'! I doesn't care a curse for nuffin now I've got a toothful or two of the right sort; here's luck," he added, placing one of the flasks which Griff Halder had given him to his lips, and taking a hearty swig.

"Sam," said Beaufort, still more alarmed, "are you bent upon hurrying us both to destruction? If you persist in going on at this outrageous and extravagant rate, you'll be mad drunk presently, and then what may the consequences not be?"

"The devil take the konsekenses," answered the ruffian, recklessly, returning the flask to his pocket, after having taken a second draught; "here's jist the little

lad as is ripe and ready for anything. Kim along, old Doleful, it's doin' nuffin' to stand patterin' here. Ve shan't meet vith any von at this here time of the mornin', I dare say, and a hour or two vill take us hout of the danger, as yer frighten yerself about, if ve only jist steps out."

There was some shadow of reason about these observations, and Beaufort could not deny it, he therefore endeavoured to content himself by remaining silent, since all remonstrance or argument were completely thrown away upon the obstinate and headstrong Sam Filcher.

He followed him, and they proceeded for some distance along the cliffs, where the marine view was of the most extensive and magnificent description, especially as it was now seen to advantage with the bright rays of the morning's sun streaming full upon it.

"Ve'd better halter our course, I think," said Sam, "it's no use a kontinuyin' along here vich is not likelier to lead to nuffin. It vos wery thoughtless of me, not to ax Griff Halder vich vos the best road for us to take as vos likelier to answer our purpis."

"It was very fortunate that you did not do so," returned Beaufort, "for that would have put them on the right scent, if they mean anything wrong."

"Bah!"

"You have already told them too much."

"Yer talk like a fool," replied Filcher. "If I'd not a been candid vith 'em, vot'd been the konsekenkses?—Vhy vot they promised, they'd have tossed us into the sea, or giv us our kevietus vith a brace of bullets in each of our brains, an' ve couldn't not have helped hour preshus selves. So let's have no more say 'bout it, but get along in the best vay ve can."

Beaufort raised no objection to this arrangement, in fact, his feelings were wrought up to such a pitch, that he had become almost indifferent, for every moment it became the more apparent to him that it would be impossible for them much longer to avoid the fate that assuredly awaited them.

They quitted the cliff, and after traversing a field or two, they suddenly found themselves in one of those pleasant country roads which stretch their way through scenery of the most romantic and picturesque description, and which had even a more cheerful aspect at that early and tranquil hour of the morning.

"A nice road, this here," observed Sam Filcher, looking as much at his ease as possible; "couldn't have had a better for trav'ling. So let's step hout, Captain, an' I shouldn't vonder but ve arrives at some crib in time for breakfast."

They did "step out," as Sam Filcher

described it, but they had not walked more than a quarter of an hour, when they saw several persons, who, as well as they could distinguish, appeared to be rustics going to their daily labour, probably, approaching, and they could hear them merrily singing one of their simple country ditties, as they came on their way.

How the wretched Beaufort envied them their apparent happiness and content.

"Ve're got some von to look at, at last, remarked Sam, "now, Captain, jist mind vot ye're about, d'yer hear? don't seem to be afeard' or sneakin', and leave the rest to me."

It was not easy for the timid Beaufort to follow the advice of his companion, but he saw thencecessity, and therefore endeavoured to do so, and, at the same time, he was compelled to admit to himself, that there was not much reason to entertain any apprehension of danger from strangers.

The rustics (for such it was now evident they were) came trudging along the road, and soon came up with Beaufort and Sam Filcher, at whom they stared with some curiosity, no doubt struck by their somewhat singular, and by no means prepossessing appearance.

Sam Filcher, however, who had given Beaufort a significant look, which it is needless to say that he perfectly understood, was quite prepared to receive them, and bustling himself up, and assuming as agreeable and insinuating a look and manner as it was possible for him to do, he said, "Good mornin', my vorthy friends, the veather's wery fine, quite splendashus."

To this one of the rustics returned some sort of answer, which was not very intelligible either to Beaufort or Sam, and then, after again staring at them rather more earnestly and suspiciously than was at all agreeable, they continued on their way, and Filcher and his companion also pursued theirs.

"There," said Sam, after he and Beaufort had got to some little distance,—"that's all right; I think I managed that here business all right, as I allvus does. The bumpkins did not seem to fancy us much, howsomdever."

"No," said Beaufort, "and they do so now;—see, they are looking back at us and are talking together."

Sam Filcher looked as Beaufort directed, and saw indeed that the rustics had stopped after proceeding a short distance past them, and were pointing towards them and seemingly consulting together.

Presently they were joined by several others, who seemed to take immediate part in their deliberations, whatever they might be.



"There's something wrong in this," remarked Beaufort, "we are again in danger."

"There, don't be frightening yerself into fits," said Sam, who, however, himself felt far from easy; "it'll be all right, no doubt; let's walk on, an' appear not to be taking any notice of 'em."

They did so, but were quickly startled by the heavy sound of footsteps, and looking back, to their dismay beheld the rustics in full pursuit of them.

They had now no alternative but to take to their heels also, and they scampered off as fast as they could.

This, no doubt, all but confirmed the suspicions of the rustics, for they increased their speed, and their shouts rent the air.

To describe the fears of the distracted Beaufort at that critical moment when the

crisis of their fate seemed so rapidly and unavoidably approaching, would be completely a fruitless task to attempt; and those of Sam Filcher, in spite of all his powerful efforts to conceal them, were almost equal; for should they not succeed in eluding them, and meeting with some temporary place of refuge, their apprehension was certain, for it would be quite madness to offer any resistance to the numbers opposed to them.

The two villains, however, driven to the last extremity, and wrought up to a pitch of desperation, might have been said to perform wonders in their precipitate retreat, and soon greatly outstripped their rustic pursuers, for whom they seemed at times not at all unlikely to prove more than a match.

The latter, however, although they were compelled to stop several times to take breath,

they being totally unused to such extraordinary exercise, appeared fully resolved not to abandon the pursuit easily, calculating, no doubt, on the ultimate exhaustion of Sam Filcher and his alarmed companion, or their being obstructed in the course of their flight by others. They therefore rent the air again with a kind of view hallo, and renewed the chase like a pack of hounds.

Beaufort looked as though he must give in every moment, and sink powerless on the earth, while the perspiration rolled off Sam, it might be almost said, in torrents.

And this continued for several minutes, and they must have traversed nearly three miles of the road, when Sam Filcher, not hearing the shouts of their pursuers, could hold out no longer without resting, but suddenly stopped, and it need scarcely be added that Beaufort followed his example.

They looked in the direction their pursuers had been coming, and then found that they had unknowingly turned an abrupt angle in the road, and had thus, at least for a minute or two, lost sight of them.

"Now's our only chance," said Sam, gasping for breath; "this is rayther sharp work for the eyes an' the limbs, as the poor old 'oman said when the vaggin wheels passed over her preshus carkiss; but only let's keep up our pluck, captain, an' we shall be able to best 'em, an' guv 'em the go by arter all, never fear."

"We are both of us dead beat, Filcher," said Beaufort, "it's no use denying, and it seems utterly impossible for us to escape. Hark! they are after us again, and appear to gain upon us."

It was quite true what he said, for the renewed shouts of the men could be heard once more distinctly on the air, and it was evident that they were gaining fast upon them.

"Hoff then we go ag'in," remarked Filcher, gathering up all his remaining strength and energy for the desperate task; "we must break out of this here road, over this hedge, an' make our way towards yonder thicket, afore they sees us, there we may be able to conceal ourselves till the danger's over. Come along, they haven't cotched us yet, an' they shan't if I can help it."

Beaufort mustered up all the firmness and resolution he could, and followed Filcher without any delay, over the hedge he had spoken of, and which was by the road-side, and they made their way with all possible speed towards the thicket, which seemed to present the only probable means of escape.

There were several clusters of trees that grew on their way which aided in concealing them from immediate observation, and, as the voices of their pursuers grew fainter and fainter till they could scarcely hear them at

all, they took courage, which was increased when, on venturing to pause in their flight, and to look back, they could perceive nothing of them.

They did not, however, stop to convince themselves that the men had abandoned the pursuit, though it appeared most probable that they had done so; but made their way without any loss of time to the thicket, which having gained, they plunged into the midst of it, suffering no obstacle to impede their progress, and here fancying themselves at least in temporary safety, they paused to rest themselves, after their extraordinary exertions, and to collect their thoughts, which as may be expected, after such an exciting adventure, were much distracted.

Sam Filcher seated himself on a mound of earth, and which was overshadowed by the branches of two stately trees, panting for breath, Beaufort following his example, and both of them too violently agitated for a minute or two to suffer them to speak a word.

Lest any danger, however, should still threaten, they both of them listened attentively, but they heard not the least sound which was at all calculated to excite their alarm, and it seemed quite evident that the rustics had at last given up the pursuit as hopeless, and the two villains did feel themselves considerably more at their ease, and could not but consider the great danger to which they had been exposed was over.

CHAPTER CLV.

THE THICKET.

"We have had a preshus narrow escape of it this here time, an' no mistake," observed Sam Filcher, when he had sufficiently recovered himself to be able to speak, "I must say, captain, that at von time I thought it vos all u p with us. Damn these here bumpkins, blest if they varn't ten times vorserer an' more determined than that here ferocious vag'n'er an' his gang."

"Yes," returned Beaufort, "and we must not make too sure of having escaped them yet. No doubt they will suspect—not seeing anything of us in the road—that we have sought concealment, and they may adopt some certain means to intercept our further flight."

"Not they," replied Sam, "they've had more than enuff of the chase, take my vord for it, an' have given it up as a bad job. We did guv 'em bellows to mend, an' no mistake. Asides if they vos to continny in search of us, which is not wery likely, they wouldn't find much chance of diskivering us here, cos we have all the hooportunity of

dodging them about. At any rate ve must take our chance, for ve must stop to rest here for avhile, arter the wery hard pull ve've had, let the kousekensens be votever they may."

Beaufort still looked uneasy, suspicious, and dissatisfied; but Sam Filcher again applied to one of the flasks of spirits which had been given to him by the smuggler, Griff Halder, and appeared to be much refreshed and reinvigorated by the hearty draught which he took of the intoxicating beverage.

"Yer look down on yer luck, captain," he said, "vhy don't yer take a drop of this? It's some of the right sort, I can tell yer, an' would soon make yer fit for anything."

"No, no," returned Beaufort, with an impatient look; "I cannot drink."

"So much the better," said Sam, "then there's more for me as can, and that here like any fish."

"The danger is not yet over," remarked Beaufort, "I am convinced it is not. It was a most unfortunate job that we met those men on the road?"

"Vell," returned Sam, "it would have been better if ve hadn't; howsomdever it couldn't be helped, who'd ha' thought that the joskins would have had any suspicion on us?"

"Some of them had no doubt read the bills offering the reward for our apprehension, and describing our persons," said Beaufort, "and if they had, no wonder that they should immediately recognise us, and the hot pursuit they kept up for some time, is easily accounted for."

"I wish ve had only been permitted to remain in the smuggler's cave till night," remarked Sam Filcher, "ve vos vell hoff there."

"I wish we had never seen them," replied Beaufort, "for I am satisfied that we have yet much to fear from them."

"Yer talk like a fool, as yer alwus does," said Sam Filcher; "vot the deuce should ve have to fear from them, I should like to know, jolly fellows as they all are, an' the way in which they treated us? Vhy, no two gemmen could have been sarved better, an' yer must be a hungrateful feller, captain, not to own it, an' to try an throw sich sinivations out ag'in their character."

"I do not forget their threats," said Beaufort, "and in spite of all you can say, Sam, I am still of the same opinion that I have just expressed, namely, that danger threatens us from the smugglers."

"Vot a preshus hobstinate chap yer air," remarked Sam, "alwus a fancying an a suspecting summat, an' there's no driving it out of yer, any how. Howsomdever, I doesn't care, I feels myself all right, an' arter a little

rest here, I shall be able to travel ag'in as fresh as a daisy, vot say yer, captain?"

"Why, that it will require all the precaution we can make use of to proceed without further molestation. Where are we going to direct our course now?"

"Can't say, 'sackly," replied Filcher, "cos I don't know."

"The sooner we get out of this part of the country the better, where it seems we are too well known," said Beaufort; "we have had so many narrow escapes since we have been in it, that I'm heartily sick of it."

"Ah," returned Sam, with a look of regret, "vot a infortunate job it vos as ve lost all thatsvag of blunt at the old 'ouse; ye might have crossed ower to the kontinent now, an' have been safe out of the way. Vell, I s'pose the best thing as ve can do now, is to make our way back to London, vhere ve shall be right enuff, an safe enuff with our old pals in the back slums an' rookeries. Vot d'yer say to that, captain?"

"It's a long and hazardous journey."

"Ah, alwus some hobjeckshun to anything as yer may perpose," said Sam, "it wouldn't be yer if there vosn't. There's not no way of pleasing yer, not no how, an that's all about it. Howsomdever, happy go lucky, I shan't put myself the least out of the way about it, but leave everything to chance."

"That's where it is," remarked Beaufort, "it is your carelessness which has so frequently involved us in danger, and exposed us to so many difficulties and inconveniences."

"In course," said Filcher, "alwus blame me for everything. Vot's the odds?—my preshus shoulders is broad enuff to bear anything. Yer seem to forget, though, that ye're cowardly looks and behaviour at all times, speshally vhen there vos the most danger, vos alwus enuff to betray us. Lor' knows vot vould ha' become of yer long ago, if I had'nt a been at yer elber to save yer. But it's no use talkin' vhen there's b'sness to attend to; b'sness, that here's the thing. So here ve can rest ourselves snugly for a time, vithout any fear of being further interrupted. Them here confounded joskins vill think that ve've guv 'em the go-by altogether, I dare say, an' that ve've got far enuff hoff by this time, so ve've nuffin to fear from them."

"I am not satisfied of that, I say again," replied Beaufort; "the rustics may only have pretended to abandon the pursuit for the purpose of deceiving us, and our emerging from this place, we shall probably find them waiting to receive us."

"Psha!" returned Sam, "yer alarm yer-self vithout a cause. Ve shall see no more of them here bumpkins, take my vord for it."

"I wish we were far away from here," said Beaufort.

"Well, so ve shall be afore long," remarked Sam, "arter ve've rested ourselves a bit. Here's luck."

As he thus spoke, he once more raised the flask to his lips and refreshed his inward man with a copious draught; then in spite of the remonstrances of Beaufort, who feared that he might be overheard by some one lurking about,—Sam finding himself perfectly happy and comfortable, commenced amusing himself in his usual way, namely, by an occasional song and whistle, frequently wetting the latter, in order to give due effect to his performance.

He was suddenly stopped in the midst of this, however, by a look of alarm from Beaufort, who, at the same time, grasped his arm, and whispered in his ear—

"Cease; unless you are resolved to betray us. Some one approaches. Hist."

Sam Filcher made no reply, but listened attentively, and felt far from easy when he plainly heard the low muttering of different voices, as if in consultation with each other, evidently close to the spot where Beaufort and himself were seated; and immediately afterwards there was a rustling sound among the branches, as if of some person or persons forcing their way, and Sam taking the arm of Beaufort, with a significant look, without so much as whispering a word, led him away from the spot, in a contrary direction to that from which the sounds which had alarmed them both proceeded.

This was no easy task, as the thicket was deeply entangled, and it was evidently not often penetrated by the traveller, however, as danger seemed again to threaten them, for they had every reason to suppose that the voices were those of their pursuers; there was scarcely any difficulty which they were not prepared to encounter and to surmount in order to avoid them.

But Beaufort could hardly control the fears which assailed him, for he could not help thinking that, although they might elude their pursuers in the intricacies of the place, they might find themselves opposed by others on emerging from it; and thus their apprehension was certain.

They got on, however, much better than they could have expected, proceeding with all the silence and caution possible, and hearing nothing more of those who had alarmed them; and at length they arrived at a spot where they could easily issue from the place, into the more open space beyond.

Here they prudently stopped for a minute to listen, in case any danger might threaten which they could take other means of avoiding, but all was perfectly silent, not a sound met their ears so that they were inspired with fresh confidence.

However, before they ventured forth, Sam

peeped out cautiously from the opening, to make doubly sure that no one from whom they had any cause to apprehend danger was lurking near.

"All's safe," he whispered to Beaufort, "there's not a hindiwidiwal nigh to hobserve us, so, if ve only loses no time, ve've got it half our own way. Come along, Captain."

The latter said nothing, though he still had his doubts and fears, of which he could never entirely divest himself,—and without any more hesitation they stepped from the opening in the thicket, into a field beyond, and, as far as their eyes could trace, not a human being or habitation were to be seen: so that they walked on at a pretty brisk rate towards a range of hills in the distance, with renewed courage, trusting that they might now be at least, beyond the reach of present danger.

"Ve alarmed ourselves about nuffin," remarked Sam, when they had proceeded a little way; "the persons ve fancied as how ve heard in the thicket might not have been those who vos in persoot of us arter all."

"It is most likely that they were," replied Beaufort, "at any rate it would have been sheer madness for us to remain there and run the risk."

"Well," returned Sam, "to be sure there is some truth an' reason about that here. Howsomdever, henemies, or not henemies, ve've guv 'em the slip, an' that here's all ve've got to care about; there's no von here to see or alarm us, so all that ve've got to do is to put our best legs foremost, while ve has the chance, an' jist see how the country looks beyond them here hills."

To this Beaufort perfectly agreed, and Sam having taken another draught of his favourite beverage, and prevailed upon his companion at last after some difficulty to do the same, they pursued their way towards the hills, Sam Filcher, having entirely got rid of his doubts and apprehensions, evincing the most excellent spirits, and even Beaufort, when he saw that the coast was quite clear, and that there was nothing to give cause for the least fear at present, felt more easy and confident.

The country on either side was open and picturesque in the extreme, and the morning being remarkably fine, it was quite sufficient of itself to raise and invigorate the spirits of those who were depressed. But the weather had very little effect upon two such individuals as Beaufort and Sam Filcher, and they walked on scarcely heeding it at all.

CHAPTER CLVI.

SAD FOREBODINGS.

Leaving Beaufort and his hardened asso-

ciate Filcher, for a time, to pursue their extraordinary adventures, we will return to our heroine and her friends.

Poor old Mark Mayfield continued to improve, but slowly, and it required the greatest care and precaution to prevent his relapsing into that state of violence which was so alarming and distressing; and Phoebe above all things was compelled to keep most carefully from his sight, lest on beholding her, he should again become excited in the same painful manner as that described in a former chapter.

This caused her many a pang of anguish, many a bitter hour of regret, from which sad state of feeling Henry Ashford and his sister often endeavoured, but in vain, to arouse her.

"Alas, it appears but too certain," she would ejaculate, in the most melancholy accents, "that there, at any rate, all the fond and flattering hopes which I have at different times ventured to cherish, and which you have so affectionately, I know, dear Henry, sought to encourage, are doomed to disappointment. I shall never more hear a father's blessing, never again be pressed with parental affection to his bosom. Oh, agonising thought, that of itself is sufficient to destroy all prospects of peace and happiness for ever."

"'Tis indeed a sad, a torturing reflection, my beloved Phoebe," answered Henry, "but you must persevere, in spite of all, and endeavour to banish it; I pray you do not give way to it, for it can only distress you without producing any favourable result. The Almighty is most merciful, and will in His own wise time, depend upon it, restore your unfortunate father to health and reason, and you to that peace and happiness from which you have been so long estranged, and to which your virtues so justly entitle you."

Phoebe looked her thanks for this affectionate speech of sympathy which she was well convinced came from his heart, and she would fain have encouraged the hopes it sought to convey, but she had been so frequently and so painfully disappointed, that she dared not.

It need scarcely be added that the gentle Amy also aided her brother to the utmost of her power in his affectionate and laudable exertions to banish the melancholy thoughts and feelings that so naturally assailed the mind of Phoebe, and made her almost constantly wretched, but it was some time ere they could in any way succeed.

The only opportunity that Phoebe now had of beholding her father—and a melancholy consolation it was—was by watching him from a back window, as she formerly used to do, when he took his daily walks in the garden carefully attended by his keepers,

and that she never failed to do, when the weather would permit his leaving the room in which he was confined, the reader may be certain.

Oh, how her heart would swell almost to bursting while engaged in this sad but tender office, and what tears of anguish would fill her eyes, as she watched the feeble and giddy footsteps of that aged parent whom she had ever so fondly revered, but whom that one false and fatal step she had taken had reduced to his present hopeless and deplorable condition.

Sometimes the poor old man would raise his venerable face towards heaven, as if in prayer, or to gaze upon the beauties of the cerulean sky, and it was in such moments that our heroine had a full opportunity of gazing upon his beloved features, and of marking the extraordinary and terrible change which the ravages of time and mental disease had wrought in them, and it was a sight which was calculated to distract her mind the more, and to destroy the few hopes she might have ventured to indulge in.

The building of the new farm of Henry Ashford had progressed with all due expedition, and so far were the works advanced, that it was fully expected about another week would bring them to completion, and that in less than a month they would be quite fit for Henry Ashford to take possession of them.

The new building was considerably larger than the one which had been destroyed, and more commodious and comfortable in every respect, and the excellent Mr. Stubbles determined not to do his good work by halves, had added several valuable acres to it from his estate.

In fact, the unexampled benevolence and philanthropy which Mr. Stubbles had exhibited on this occasion, was beyond all praise, and it was the universal theme of admiration among all classes throughout the country, by those who were acquainted with the circumstances.

As for Henry Ashford and his amiable sister, their feelings of gratitude were too great to be expressed by words, and they could therefore only evince it by their conduct, which, however, it was quite impossible to misunderstand.

The most friendly wishes were expressed by all parties who felt the least interested, for the prosperity of his new undertaking, and congratulated as he was on all sides, Henry could not but look forward to the future with the most sanguine hopes and expectations.

Thus matters stood, and by dint of perseverance, and the untiring exertions of her friends, Phoebe had been enabled to obtain a degree of tranquility and comparative resig-

nation which could hardly have been expected, when a circumstance occurred which took them all by surprise, and caused the greatest and most painful excitement.

It was about a week before their intended occupation of the farm, that Phoebe, Henry, and his sister, were sitting one afternoon in a lower apartment of the hall, engaged in conversation.

Our heroine had been in a more depressed state of mind than for several days previously, and from which her lover and Amy had in vain sought all in their power to arouse her; Dismal forebodings for which there was no accounting, haunted her imaginations, and made her truly miserable.

Her heart was so full that it felt as though it would burst, tears trembled unbidden in her eyes, and convulsive sobs frequently escaped her bosom which she could not restrain or control, and which were most painful to hear.

"Dearest Phoebe," said Henry in a voice of the deepest sympathy, and taking her hand affectionately, "how it tortures me to see you thus. For Heaven's sake what is it that so distresses you, and which has made so strange and powerful an impression on your mind?"

"Alas!" sighed our heroine, in reply, "I know not, but indeed I cannot conquer it, let me strive all I may. Strange, wild thoughts distract and bewilder my brain, and at times my very senses seem to reel beneath their influence. A feeling of unaccountable dread unnerves me, and terrible forebodings of something particular which is about to happen, and which nothing can avert, haunts my fevered imagination, and makes me truly wretched."

"'Tis most astonishing and distressing," remarked Amy, "but such thoughts and feelings where there is no absolute or immediate cause for them, can be only caused by nervous illness. Exert yourself, dear Phoebe, though difficult the task may be,—and try to banish them."

Phoebe shook her head mournfully.

"Aye, dear Phoebe," said her lover, "try to follow the advice of my sister. Come, we will change this melancholy subject, and endeavour to divert your thoughts into another channel."

"Alas!" sighed our heroine, in reply to Henry, "'tis useless my attempting to do so, I feel convinced that no other thoughts or subjects can at present engage my mind, than the melancholy ones which have now taken such powerful and extraordinary hold of it. You may deem me weak, childish, but indeed I cannot help it;—I cannot help it."

Overpowered by her emotions, she covered her face with her hands, and found some relief in a copious flood of tears.

Henry and his sister were much affected, and, in spite of themselves, could not help to some extent participating in the strange feelings that had taken possession of the poor girl, but for a few minutes they did not offer to interrupt her in giving vent to her grief, for they thought that it might afford her some relief.

But when the paroxysm of her emotions had somewhat abated, and she was enabled to look up again, they did all that they could to soothe her,—although all that they could say, had but comparatively very little effect,

"You may think me still more weak and foolish," she observed, after a moment or two's reflection, "if I acknowledge that the melancholy thoughts and forebodings I now express, have their principal origin in a strange and painful dream which haunted my imagination last night."

"A dream, my dear Phoebe?" said her lover, with a look of surprise, "is it possible that a dream can have disturbed you thus, or that you can suffer it to prey upon your mind?"—

"It is true, Henry," she replied, "and I almost blush to own that Lord Selborne formed the subject of it."

"Lord Selborne!" repeated Henry, with a look of emotion.

"Yes, Henry," said our heroine, "although Heaven knows that he was farthest from my thoughts on my retiring to rest."

"But the dream, dear Phoebe?" interrogated Amy eagerly.

"But a minute or two to collect my thoughts," returned Phoebe, "and I will relate it."

CHAPTER CLVII.

THE DREAM.—THE LETTER.

"Methought," commenced our heroine, at last, "that I had rambled alone in the dusk of the evening, to the Hazel Dell, and that all was profoundly silent around, not even a breath of wind disturbing the leaves, while a tone of melancholy, which was irresistible, pervaded everything.

"A secret impulse I thought had urged me to that spot, so blissfully yet painfully associated with me by so many important circumstances, though whether or not I had gone there with any fixed purpose, I had not the least idea.

"While I stood, with my hands pressed upon my forehead, buried, as I fancied in my dream, in thought, I was suddenly startled by hearing a moaning sound, as if proceeding from some unfortunate being in their last agonies, and which was immedi-

ately followed by the mention of my name in the faint tones of a man's voice.

"I cannot describe the mingled emotions of astonishment and fear, which I imagined in my dream, came over me on hearing this. I was unable to move from the spot, though I was anxious to do so, and I clung to the trunk of a tree for support, while a sickly sensation came over me, and my limbs trembled violently.

"My name was repeated in tones more melancholy than before, and I fixed my eyes anxiously in the direction from whence they seemed to proceed, but at first I saw nothing, and the gloom of evening had now so increased as to render objects almost undiscernable.

"At length, however, still straining my eyes in the same direction, I beheld the shadowy form of a man, apparently with much difficulty, and in intense pain, staggering into the Dell; still I had not the power to move from the spot, or to utter a syllable.

"The stranger seemed to observe me, and also to recognise me; notwithstanding the darkness, and with a faint exclamation, he staggered forward, and sunk exhausted at my feet, and it was then I perceived that he was bleeding from a fearful wound he had received, and it occurred to me in my dream that he had been attacked by robbers.

"Notwithstanding the terror which naturally agitated me, methought I was induced to stoop down and to raise the head of the wounded man, and at that moment the pale moon for the first time, peeped from behind a cloud, and accelerated my view.

"Oh, God! whose were the ghastly but well known features upon which I then gazed? They were those of Lord Selborne."

Here our heroine was compelled to pause, in consequence of the power of her emotions and the recollection of that remarkable part of her singular dream, evidently filled her with terror.

Henry and his sister were almost as much agitated as herself, but they made no observation, and after the lapse of two or three minutes, during which she had somewhat regained her composure, our heroine thus proceeded—

"Surprise and terror enchained all my faculties, and I could not resign my hold of him, or remove my appalled gaze from his ghastly features, which were distorted by all the frightful agonies of approaching death.

"But suddenly he opened his eyes, and fixed them upon me with an expression which it is utterly impossible for me ever to forget.

"He made several convulsive efforts to speak, but could not, and the agony of feeling which he evinced at that fearful moment is indescribable.

"At length, after a desperate struggle, he did so; 'Phoebe,' I heard him say, in tones scarcely audible, 'my—my wife—my lawful wife! for—forgive!'

"His head sunk back on my arm, and I found that he was a corpse. With the unspeakable horror of that moment I awoke."

Phoebe ceased, and again covering her face with her hands abandoned herself to the anguish and horror of her feelings.

The emotions of Henry and his sister at that to which they had so attentively, and with so much astonishment listened, were for a few minutes too great for utterance, and they stood and gazed vacantly at each other, apparently half stupified.

There was something so remarkable and apparently prophetic in the dream, that Henry felt the impression most forcibly, and the mingled emotions of fear, surprise, and despair, that agitated him, bewildered his senses, and almost drove his brain to distraction.

He could not marvel at the great excitement under which Phoebe had laboured during the day, and the dismal forebodings and apprehensions which had tortured her breast, on being made acquainted with the cause, and those presentiments he was now himself compelled fully to participate in.

Such a fearful dream was sufficient to unnerve even the most stout-hearted and insensible, and it was one which, at the same time, could not be effaced from the memory.

Still Henry remained silent; in fact, he knew not what to say; and our heroine continued in the same attitude, without uttering a word, and apparently completely absorbed in painful thought,

But at length Henry aroused himself, and approaching her, gently took her hand, and in a melancholy but affectionate voice, uttered her name.

Eagerly she looked up at him, as he spoke, and the tears still trembled in her eyes, while her bosom throbbed with a strange and unutterable emotion

"Oh, my beloved Phoebe," ejaculated Henry, "how extraordinary is that which you have been relating. It was a fearful dream; but still it was *but a dream*, and as such, notwithstanding all the circumstances connected with it, it ought not to be seriously regarded, or even allowed to occupy the memory."

"Oh, it is impossible to forget it," replied our heroine; "or to treat it so lightly as you suggest. The dying and impressive words which I imagined Lord Selborne to utter, and the look with which he spoke them, bear all the weight of reality in my mind, and they still seem to ring in mine ears. Oh, if they prove to be prophetic, if by the merciful will of the Almighty it should yet be indisputably

shown that I was made the lawful wife of his lordship, although, when he cast me from him, he so solemnly declared to the contrary, what a terrible weight would it remove from my conscience; what bright fond hopes would it revive in my breast."

"True," said Henry, "and yet, I would advise you not for the present to dwell upon so melancholy, so bewildering, so torturing a subject, but to leave it to some future period, when your mind may be in a more fit state to reflect calmly upon it. Remember that after all, it was but a strange wild dream, an illusion of the senses, which has agitated you so violently."

"A dream!" repeated our heroine, with much emotion, and which she was unable to conquer, "and is it any the more to be treated with indifference, because of that?—Are not dreams frequently prophetic?—Have they not often been realities?"

Henry was about to make some reply to this, but before he could do so, there was a loud knock at the outer door which made them start, and Phoebe turned pale and trembled.

The next moment a servant entered the room with a letter, which he delivered into the hands of Phoebe, saying that the village postman had just brought it, and then bowing, retired from the apartment.

Our heroine felt a sickly sensation come over her, as she took the letter, (for she knew not who there was to write to her), and she trembled so violently with the strong forebodings that crossed her mind, that it was some minutes ere she could venture to look at the superscription, while the agitation of Henry and his sister were almost equal to her own.

At length Phoebe found strength and resolution to read the address on the letter, but no sooner had her eyes glanced at it, than she uttered an exclamation of surprise and the greatest emotion, the letter dropped unopened from her hand, and she sunk back in her chair almost insensible.

CHAPTER CLVIII.

THE CONTENTS OF THE LETTER.

A presentiment of the truth crossed the mind of Henry, and he eagerly, yet fearfully picked up the letter, while his sister hastened to the assistance of Phoebe.

"Henry looked to the superscription, on the letter, and sighed as he did so.

"It is from Lord Selborn," he ejaculated, "the characters are too familiar to me."

"Ah," exclaimed Phoebe, reviving at the mention of the name, "my dream, did I not

say that it would prove prophetic? That letter—give it me, Henry."

Her lover did so, and she broke the seal and unfolded it with a trembling hand. But a mist seemed to gather before her eyes as she vainly endeavoured to peruse the contents, and in a faint voice she said—

"I cannot, dare not read it. What can the guilty man have to say to me? Read it aloud, Henry, I have no secrets from you.

Henry reluctantly, yet with unconquerable curiosity, took the letter, almost shrinking from the painful task that was imposed upon him, and it was some minutes before he could find courage to commence it, which, however, he did at last as follows—

THE LETTER.

"Ever beloved, but much injured Phoebe, *wife*, my trembling pen might almost venture to write, in spite of all that has happened, and the cruel manner in which I deceived, betrayed you—"

At the mention of the word *wife*, so truly in keeping with the incident in her dream, our heroine uttered a faint cry, and Henry Ashford was equally as much agitated as herself, and it was some minutes ere he could proceed with the reading of the strange and important letter, but at length he did so, as follows, being frequently interrupted in the course of his painful task, by the emotions of Phoebe and his sister.

"Phoebe, you may curse the wretched author of this epistle from your heart, and cast it from you with hatred and contempt, but I could no longer resist the burning anxiety of my soul to once more address you, and to implore you with maddening feelings of remorse to read my observations, and if you can with calmness, patience, and forbearance.

"I know how great is my presumption in thus appealing, probably for the last time, to that fair and innocent being whom I have so deeply wronged, but I am on the rack of torture and despair, and have no control over my actions. I scarcely know what I say, but could pour forth my whole soul in penitence, and perish at your feet, still, beloved Phoebe, were I but permitted to do so.

"Think not that I seek to prejudice the virtuous love of yourself and the noble-minded Henry Ashford, whom I have already too cruelly injured; Heaven forbid that I should do so, still I shudder with a instinctive feeling of horror, which I cannot find words to express, at the thought of your being united for the present, and I would pray you to defer that union, which my villainy, I own, should never have interrupted yet a little longer.



"It is presumptuous, I know, to make such a bold and apparently unreasonable request,—especially coming from a guilty wretch like me,—but I cannot resist the temptation to do so, even venturing to hope that you will not, after calm and dispassionate consideration, refuse to grant my request.

"And what are my motives for thus urgently appealing to you, unfortunate Phoebe? are they selfish? are they guided by sinister designs? ah, no, for Heaven knows how sincere is my repentance, and how anxious I am to make all the earthly atonement I can for the crimes of which I have been guilty.

"I feel myself upon the brink of the grave; my days, if not my hours are numbered, and I shrink with horror from the

idea of falsehood, or any attempt at subterfuge; but, oh, God, grant that my life may be sufficiently prolonged to enable me to remove or confirm the strange doubts and suspicions that beset my mind, and on which so much of your future happiness depends.

"Phoebe, I have lately heard that which leads me to suspect that I have as much deceived myself as you.

"I speak in problems, and I dare scarcely venture to be explicit. My brain is bewildered with racking thoughts, and I scarcely know what I say.

"Let me be firm, and write the truth. Phoebe, then, I have heard that which leads me strongly to doubt, notwithstanding the improbability and extravagance of the idea, whether or not *you are my lawful*

wife! Heaven grant, for your dear sake that I may be enabled to prove that you are so, and thus remove the foul reproach and stigma from your name, that my villany has cast upon it; then can I, methinks, die happy!

"I am now engaged heart and soul in this important enquiry; that accomplished, my earthly career is at an end,—and—oh, how earnestly would I implore your forgiveness, but dare not.

"For the love of Heaven, for the love of mercy, grant me some reply to this, if it be only a line.

"I dare not trust myself to write more than to subscribe myself,

"The unhappy penitent,

"SELBORNE."

*"St. James's Square, London,
April, 1819."*

Thus ended this strange, rambling, and ambiguous letter, and at the conclusion of its perusal, our heroine, her lover, and Amy evinced still greater agitation than before, and gazed at each other in amazement and bewilderment.

As she thought indeed of some of the more important passages in the letter, namely, those to where the probability of her being the lawful wife of Lord Selborne occurred, and which so strangely corresponded with the singular circumstances of her dream, Phoebe was almost convulsed with emotion, and the feelings of Henry Ashford were equally as excited.

They had neither of them the power to speak for a few minutes, and Amy was also as much surprised and bewildered as themselves.

"Now, Henry," at length Phoebe found power to say, "what think you of my dream? Believe you that it deserved to be treated with indifference? Oh, my heart too well foreboded from it, that something of a torturing nature was about to happen from it, and those surmises and apprehensions are now confirmed."

"Wretched, guilty Selborne," returned Henry, "I can learn to sympathise with him, for remorse seems to have wrung his soul, and madness to have taken possession of his brain."

"Oh, do you then believe his penitence to have been sincere?" inquired Phoebe eagerly.

"I would fain believe so," replied Henry, "for he must indeed be a base hypocrite could he dissimulate thus; I believe the wretched nobleman to be driven by remorse to all the madness of despair, and that his remarks regarding your being his lawful

wife, dearest Phoebe, are only caused by a delusion of the senses."

"Alas!" sighed our heroine, pressing her fair hands upon her aching forehead, and her heart throbbing violently, "I know not what to think; my brain is bewildered, would to heaven that this torturing and mysterious letter had never met my sight or knowledge."

"Pray drop the subject for the present, dear Phoebe," suggested the gentle Amy, "till you have had time to collect yourself, and compose your feelings; you are in no mood to discuss it now."

"Oh, it is impossible for me to do as you advise, Amy," answered our heroine, "with all the thoughts and fancies that are pressing upon my brain. Guilty, wretched Selborne, oh, why did you not suffer me to endeavour to forget you, if I could not forgive you? Why did I ever hear from you again, thus reviving torturing, torturing, recollections, and adding to the miseries of the present."

"Deeply do I regret that this painful circumstance should have occurred, dear Phoebe," observed her lover, "for I fear that it will cause us all many an hour of uneasiness and painful reflection, if no other unhappy result occurs. But pray now endeavour to be calm, and suffer not the contents of this letter to torture your mind with fears, misgivings, and forebodings, which after all may prove to be fallacious."

"Ah, Henry," returned our heroine, with a mournful look, "how easy is it to advise, but how difficult to act upon that advice, under such extraordinary and peculiar circumstances. The tenor of his lordship's letter is so serious, and even solemn, (writing as one to whom life is of no value, and from whom it is fast waning), that it is quite impossible for it not to make a powerful and painful impression upon the mind, or to banish it easily from the memory. Again I say, my brain is bewildered, and I know not how to act. I dare not attempt to answer his letter, and yet, something seems to tell me that a final reply is absolutely necessary."

"Dear Phoebe," said her lover, "oh, how could you ever accomplish so arduous and painful a task? in what language could you possibly reply to one who so cruelly deceived you, (and who is the cause of all your sufferings and misfortunes), notwithstanding his present professions of remorse and repentance?—I do not mean to deny that a reply of some description to the wretched nobleman's epistle should be returned, common justice and humanity demand it, but it requires time to consider

it maturely and dispassionately, therefore do I propose that we defer the further discussion of the subject till to-morrow."

"Yes, dear Phoebe," said Amy, earnestly and affectionately, "pray try to do as my brother advises. Let the matter rest till to-morrow, by which time you will probably have sufficiently composed your feelings to allow you to come to a calm and just decision."

"I will endeavour to do as your brother and yourself, Amy, urge me," answered Phoebe, seeking to stifle the emotions that still laboured in her breast, "certain as I am that you are prompted by the best and most affectionate of motives. Till to-morrow then, we will postpone the further discussion of this melancholy, important, and torturing subject."

This arrangement come to, they sought to divert their thoughts by conversing on other topics, but in spite of all their efforts they could not do so with any freedom or spirit, and frequent intervals of silence fully showed whither their ideas continued to wander.

The remainder of the afternoon passed tediously and gloomily away, neither of them being able, as has been before stated, to get themselves into the humour to converse freely, and at an earlier hour than usual, our heroine and Amy separated from Henry and retired to their chamber.

The letter of Lord Selborne filled the mind of Henry Ashford with various conflicting thoughts and emotions, and on the retirement of his sister and Phoebe to their chambers, he walked into the grounds attached to the Hall to give undisturbed indulgence to them; it being a fine moonlight night, and he not feeling inclined to retire to rest so early, especially in his present state of mind.

CHAPTER CLIX.

SAD REFLECTIONS.—A SUPERNATURAL SCENE.

HENRY wandered on in the extensive grounds to some distance from the mansion, with his arms folded upon his chest, and so deeply wrapped in gloomy meditation, that he could take not the least notice of anything around him.

He at length reached a small arbour in a retired spot, where he threw himself on a seat in the most disconsolate manner, and continued the chain of his melancholy and bewildering reflections.

He could not but feel the most painful regret that Lord Selborne should ever have

written and sent the letter, for its contents he could not deny were of the most impressive description, and he almost trembled to think what effect they might ultimately have upon Phoebe. She might be carried away by her natural gentle feelings, place too much reliance in the unfortunate, but guilty nobleman's assertions, and she might hesitate to fulfil her engagements to him, (Henry), and thus drive him to a state of uncertainty and doubt, if not to absolute despair.

But no, he could not think so basely of her as to suppose that anything would induce her to break those tender promises she had so fervently made to him, to deceive him, and thus to annihilate all those bright hopes he had so fondly cherished, and make him one of the most wretched of human beings in existence.

Oh no, it was impossible that, under any circumstances whatever, she could do so, and he could not but keenly reproach himself for having for a moment entertained even the shadow of such a thought to her prejudice.

"I am wrong, extremely wrong," he soliloquized, "in anticipating anything of the kind. It is only natural, and was to be expected, that Phoebe's feelings should be painfully excited on the receipt of such a letter, the more especially after the extraordinary dream which she related to me and my sister; but it by no means follows that it should alter the sentiments she has so warmly, and I believe sincerely expressed towards me, or tempt her to retract her vows. Let me no longer torture myself with such groundless fears and suspicions, and which at the same time, is doing her so cruel an injustice."

He was suddenly startled from these reflections by an unusual and supernatural light (not that of the moon,) which glared full upon him in at the arbour, and lighted up the open space before it for some distance.

He looked up amazed, and started to his feet, and the strange light continued to increase, forming a bright halo of a perfectly unearthly description.

A feeling of awe came over Henry, which he could not resist, and he scarcely dared venture to breathe, waiting, as he did, for something of a most extraordinary nature, which he felt certain was about to happen, and he was unable to move an inch from the spot on which he was standing.

The light gradually expanded itself till it formed a kind of circle, in the centre of which arose from the earth a thin vapour which slowly dispersed, and to the awe and astonishment of Henry he saw standing on

the spot, a shadowy form (apparently that of a female), and which gradually became more and more distinct.

Henry rubbed his eyes, to convince himself that he was not dreaming, or labouring under some sickly delusion of the senses, and then he again looked timidly towards the spot, and there palpable to the sight stood the spectral form of the poor old Gipsy Sybil, her unearthly eyes fixed upon him, her long fleshless arm extended towards him as it used to be in life, and the blood yet appearing to trickle from a gaping wound in her side.

It would be impossible to describe the feelings of wonder, awe, if not terror, that agitated the breast of Henry, at this fearful vision (for such it certainly was), and for a few moments was completely paralyzed to the spot, and unable to utter a sound.

He continued with his eyes fixed upon the ghastly form, which remained in the same attitude; he could not be mistaken; it was no earthly visitant that stood before him, and terror enchained all his faculties.

But at length he aroused and somewhat recovered himself, and made a slight movement forward towards the ghastly form, but it waved its bony hand as if warning him to keep back, and the next moment the following words sounded distinctly in his ears, uttered in a hollow sepulchral voice:—

“Approach me not, I am no longer of this earth; the assassin’s knife ended my earthly career months since, and my inhuman murder yet remains unavenged.”

Henry shuddered, yet some invisible power, which he could not resist, seemed to urge him to question the spectre, and, in a tremulous voice he said,

“Dread spirit, am I permitted to inquire who were your murderers?”

“The man Filcher and his associate,” was the distinct answer, in the same hollow tones, though the pale lips of the spectre appeared not to move.

“And why, awful phantom, do you appear before me?” asked the awe-struck Henry, in the same faltering tones.

“To warn you,” answered the spectre, that the crisis of your fate, and that of her you love, is approaching. Constancy and virtue shall meet with their due reward, but wed not till you see the penitent betrayer.”

As the last words died away upon his ears, the spectral form seemed gradually to diminish and sink into the earth, until it entirely faded away from the sight, and the pale moonbeams, were the only light that shone upon the spot on which it had stood.

The faculties of Henry Ashford were completely, for the moment, suspended by astonishment and awe, at what he not only imagined, but felt certain he had seen and heard; and he stared vacantly and aghast.

But he was suddenly aroused by hearing his name repeated in a lusty voice, and he had scarcely time enough to compose his feelings in the least degree, so as to prevent exciting any curiosity, when the worthy Mr. Stubbles appeared in sight upon the lawn, and observing Henry, he hurried towards him.

Few of our readers, we believe, will be found superstitious enough, not to be rather sceptical upon the supernatural matters just treated of, and of that class of persons we confess ourselves to be among the number. Such vulgar and ignorant notions have long since exploded with the majority, and the rapid advance of education among all classes of the people, must soon extinguish them altogether.

We have merely related the supposed facts, to illustrate the strange power of imagination when dwelling upon one particular subject, and the mind is disordered and bewildered.

But to return to Henry Ashford.

“What, Henry, my boy,” said the hearty old squire, taking his hand; “I am glad I’ve found you at last, for I’ve been looking for you in every nook and corner. The lasses have retired to rest; but I thought, as it was early yet, you and I might just take a bit of supper, and smoke a pipe together, and have a comfortable bit of gossip over a jug or two of my old yale, for an hour or two, eh? what say you my lad?”

Henry endeavoured to conceal his agitation, and, much against his will, however, said that he had not the least objection, and Mr. Stubbles linking his arm in that of his young friend, they quitted the spot and entered the hall together, and were immediately seated at the supper table, much to the annoyance of Henry, who felt himself under the most painful restraint, and regretted that he had not been able to steal into his own chamber without encountering Mr. Stubbles.

He had a great difficulty in struggling with his own gloomy thoughts, from which the good-humoured observations of the squire failed entirely to arouse him.

“Why, Harry, lad,” said Mr. Stubbles, “how dull you are to-night to be sure; any one might think that something very serious had happened to you, such as a quarrel with your sweetheart, or something of that sort. Come, my young friend, I don’t like to see you dull and moping like this. Will you

not take a pipe and a jug or two of ale, and that will quickly set you all to rights?"

"Excuse me, my good old friend and benefactor," replied Henry, with the utmost respect, "but I do not feel at all well this evening, and shall be obliged to you if you would allow me to retire."

"I do not like to lose the pleasure of your society, I assure you," answered the squire, "but as you say you are not well, and you certainly do look pale and ill, of course I can raise no objection. So, good night, Harry, my boy, and I wish you better by the morning."

Henry cordially shook his kind friend by the hand and then retired to his chamber glad to be left again to the free and uninterrupted indulgence of his own thoughts.

CHAPTER CLX.

THE RUSTIC GALA AT THE NEW FARM.

HENRY, when left alone, fell into a deep reverie, and the remarkable events of the evening working upon his imagination, soon wrought him up to a pitch of the greatest excitement.

He firmly believed that he had seen the spectre of the murdered old Gipsy Sybil, and the strange words it had uttered still seemed to ring in his ears, and were indelibly stamped upon his memory, especially the last, and upon the realization of which, the fate of himself and his beloved Phoebe seemed to depend.

He racked his brain to no purpose in endeavouring to unravel the meaning of them, and the longer he tried to do so the deeper he became involved in doubt and perplexity. That they were calculated to inspire hope, however, rather than to excite despair, was quite certain.

Knowing the terror which it would naturally excite in the mind of our heroine, however, especially after the other trying and remarkable events of the day, he resolved to say nothing to her about it, for the present, at any rate; and after about another hour's meditations, without being able to come to any satisfactory conclusion upon the subject, he abandoned it for the night, and sought his couch.

Phoebe and her fair companion on retiring to their chamber, notwithstanding the latter had persuaded, and the former had promised to drop the painful subject till the following day, resumed the conversation upon the extraordinary contents of Lord Selborne's letter, and continued it for some time; but at length growing

tired, and not being able to come to any satisfactory conclusion, they also retired to rest.

In the morning all parties met much more composed and in better spirits than, under the circumstances, could have been expected. Henry had quite recovered from the terror caused by his awful adventure of the previous night, and took good care not to hint a word about it; and Phoebe seemed perfectly calm and prepared to act by the advice of her friends.

The morning meal passed over without any reference to the subject, and then Henry proposed to our heroine a plan which had occurred to him, with regard to the letter of Lord Selborne, which he thought would save her much unnecessary pain and trouble, and probably set the matter quietly at rest.

This was that he should reply to his Lordship's epistle, merely acknowledging its receipt, and stating that she (Phoebe) hoped that his penitence and remorse were sincere, but positively declined all further correspondence with him.

Of this reply our heroine readily approved; the letter was written and forwarded to London without delay, Phoebe became more easy in her mind, and in the course of a few days became comparatively tranquil, and seldom alluded to the subject.

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Two or three weeks had elapsed since the remarkable events recorded in the two or three foregoing chapters, and it was now "the merry month of May"—sweet smiling May—month of flowers and fragrance, and nothing could be more charming than the weather, while all things seemed to rejoice with it.

Henry Ashford had taken possession of his new farm, and at the suggestion of Mr. Stubbles, he had resolved to give a housewarming with a rustic festival and maypole dance in one of his meadows.

Great preparations had been made for some days by Henry and Mr. Stubbles for the merry-making, and in which our heroine took a most active part. Many gentry had promised to honour it by their presence; all the rustics in the neighbourhood were invited, a choice band of village musicians were secured, good old English fare was to be abundantly supplied, and, in short, it was fully anticipated that everything on that joyous occasion would go off with the greatest eclat.

In the pleasurable excitement of her feelings, while these preparations were going on, Phoebe for a time forgot her cares and anxieties, and entered with the greatest freedom, alacrity, and spirit into

everything, and in which she was heartily joined by Amy.

Mr. Stubbles made himself most conspicuous in everything, and notwithstanding the remonstrances of Henry and his sister, would insist upon paying the greatest share of the expenses, in fact, he was never so happy as when he was contributing to the happiness and welfare of others, and although a wealthy man, his heart might almost be said to be too large for his purse.

The happy morning arrived at last, and as one of the simple rustics justly observed, "a brighter one never shone out of the Heavens." It was a true May-day, nature cheerful, decked in her loveliest garb, and smiling everywhere. The balmy air was redolent of fragrance from the soft petals of myriads of opening flowers, fresh from the dew of early morn, and the feathered songsters from every leafy spray carolled forth their sweetest and most mellifluous notes, making the air resound again with harmony.

The arrangements were all perfect, and at an early hour the humble guests began to assemble, dressed in their holiday gear, and joyful expectation lighting up every face.

Tables at which the peasantry were to dine, were arranged in a large field near the farm; the gay maypole reared its lofty decorated head on the green meadow, where seats were placed for the superior guests to view the merry scene, and a temporary gallery was erected for the accommodation of the rustic musicians.

Our heroine and Amy were attired with simple elegance, and Henry thought, as he gazed enraptured upon her, that the former had never looked more lovely than she did on that auspicious occasion.

As for Mr. Stubbles and his worthy lady, they luxuriated in a profusion of extravagant finery, which quite dazzled and astonished the simple rustics, and drew forth repeated bursts of admiration, as they moved delighted and familiarly among them.

But the principal storm of enthusiasm and delight was reserved for the appearance of Henry Ashford, with Phoebe Mayfield and Amy leaning on either arm, and the hearty shouts that rent the air, were truly deafening, and lasted several minutes, completely overwhelming our heroine, Henry, and his sister, and the conducting them to their seats was a perfect oration.

Tranquillity and sober mirth was at length obtained, and then the sports of the day commenced in earnest; the musicians, after a few preliminaries, struck up their best, and their hardest, and right gaily and correctly was the Maypole dance executed by the blooming village maidens and their

rustic swains, to the infinite amusement and admiration of the spectators, who testified their pleasure by frequent bursts of well-earned applause.

Then came round the time for the dinner, and a glorious sight it was to see the numerous humble guests enjoying themselves to their hearts' content, over the abundant supply of the best of good old English fare so liberally provided for them.

The feasting over, the revels were resumed with increased spirit, those who did not join in the dance, amusing themselves with various athletic, and humorous sports, such as leaping, running, jumping in sacks, etc., which caused much fun, and was all in keeping with the joyous occasion.

And thus the festivities continued with unabated spirit throughout the day, and till a late hour of the night, when the company broke up, and after three hearty cheers retired to their various humble homes, and it was long ere the house warming at the new farm of Henry Ashford could be forgotten by them.

CHAPTER CLXI.

LORD SELBORNE.

SEATED in one of the elegant apartments in his spacious mansion St. James's Square, was Lord Selborne, in his dressing gown and slippers, unshaven, and his fine head of hair now in complete disorder.

His elbow rested on the table (on which were scattered various papers,) his head rested on his hand, his eyes were cast down, and, in fact, nothing could possibly be more truly melancholy and wretched than his appearance altogether.

The furniture of this apartment was also neglected, dusty and disarranged, for the unhappy nobleman had not suffered any one to disturb it for the last few days, he making the room his place of seclusion, and refusing to see any visitors, even his medical adviser on any pretext whatever.

His face was ghastly pale, his eyes sunk in their sockets, his cheeks hollow, and his once fine manly form was bent and attenuated, shewing in unmistakable characters, the long and intense bodily and mental sufferings he had undergone.

He had all the appearance of a man of seventy instead of one just in the prime of life.

The time of which we are now writing, was two days after the one on which he had despatched the letter to our heroine, and he was awaiting the result with the

most terrible anxiety and suspense that can well be imagined. Frequent sighs escaped his breast, and at times he started wildly from his seat with his hands pressed upon his forehead, as though some fearful idea had struck him, and he was driven to madness and despair.

And what agony of mind, what hours of dreadful racking thought it had cost him to write that letter; how he at last accomplished that task has been shown.

For some days previous to his coming to the determination of addressing a final letter to Phoebe, his lordship had been haunted and tortured by the most dismal presentiments that his end was approaching, and he shrunk from the idea of death with the greatest fear and trembling, until he had received her forgiveness for the many injuries he had done her.

Other matters had also agitated the distracted nobleman's mind, and filled him with mingled hopes, and doubts, and fears.

The dark hints which the villain Beaufort had thrown out to him, on more than one occasion, respecting his supposed mock marriage with our heroine, frequently recurred to his memory, and excited various surmises and suspicions, which he almost feared to encourage, and yet he found it utterly impossible entirely to reject them.

It was that which induced to him to make use of the ambiguous remarks which he had done in his letter, and which had so agitated and bewildered our heroine and her lover.

"She will not deign to answer my appeal," at length ejaculated his lordship, starting from his seat, and pacing the room to and fro with disordered steps, and in a state bordering upon phrensy; "fool! madman that I must be to imagine that she would do so. She will turn away from the perusal of it with disgust and bitter contempt, still believing that I am acting the part of a base hypocrite, and nothing will ever convince her to the contrary. Oh, agony, most insupportable; the torments of perdition cannot be greater than those I now endure."

In an agony of despair he again threw himself in his chair, and covering his face with his hands, he abandoned himself to all the terrible thoughts and feelings that distracted his mind.

A loud postman's knock at the outer door aroused him, and so terribly agitated him, that the perspiration stood upon his forehead in large drops, and his limbs trembled so violently, that they could hardly support him.

A servant immediately afterwards entered the room, and presented him a

letter, which he received with a hasty and trembling hand, and for a few minutes he was so violently agitated and confused that a mist seemed to gather before his eyes, and he could not see to read.

But at length when he had succeeded in somewhat recovering himself, he looked anxiously at the address on the letter, and when he had done so, a groan of disappointment and despair escaped him, and he struck his forehead with his clenched fist.

"It is not from her," he sighed; "the handwriting is that of a man, but I know it not. Oh, what excruciating torture is this!"

Again he groaned, and paced the room with agitated steps; but at length unable to endure the agony of suspense longer, in a fit of desperation, he broke the seal of the letter, and hastily glancing over the brief contents, it dropped from his hand, and he sunk back in his chair, almost in a state of insensibility.

For some minutes he remained in this deplorable condition,—convulsive sobs and groans alone escaping his bosom, and his whole frame agitated in the most terrible manner.

At length he started from his seat like a madman, and looked the very picture of despair.

"'Tis done," he ejaculated, in a hollow and almost unearthly voice; "she has struck the final blow, which seals my doom, and nothing but death awaits me. She disbelieves the sincerity of penitence and remorse, she treats my appeal, my assertions with scorn, she thinks of me only with disgust and abhorrence, and my cup of misery is filled to the brim. Oh, God! why hast thou permitted me to live to see this day?"

Once more he groaned in all the bitterness of insupportable anguish, and struck his forehead with his clenched fists; then he sank helplessly back in his chair in a kind of lethargy, and so remained for some time, lost to everything around him.

"But I will not yield without one more desperate effort!" he at length exclaimed resolutely, as a sudden thought seemed to flash across his distracted brain; "I will see her again, if it be but to die at her feet, and thus to prove the sincerity of my penitence. Madness and despair urge me on, and I will not delay my departure any longer than to morrow morning."

It was indeed a desperate resolution in the deplorable state of his health, but his mind was made up in the instant, and nothing whatever, in consequence, could have the power to move him from his purpose.

The next morning, the faithful William on entering his unfortunate master's chamber at the usual hour, was startled to find he was not there, but happening to cast his eyes towards the table he observed a letter lying upon it, which was addressed to him, and in his lordship's handwriting.

It merely contained the following few lines :—

"Business of importance calls for my immediate departure from Town, and may detain me some weeks. Be not alarmed, and make no enquiry, I may communicate with you shortly." "SELBORNE."

William was astounded, and seriously alarmed, as were all the other domestics when they heard of it, and numerous were the fruitless conjectures that were formed as to the intentions of Lord Selborne, or whither he was gone.

Firm in his resolution, Lord Selborne had quietly departed from the mansion before any of the servants had risen, and immediately making his way to the coach-office, he took his place inside the mail coach, and was soon on his way from London.

At the end of the first day's journey, however, (for the journey to York at that time could not be accomplished in much less than three days,) his lordship was taken so seriously ill, that medical assistance was obliged to be immediately called in, to whom he communicated his title, but earnestly desired that intelligence should not be forwarded to his friends at the time of the greatest emergency.

It was nearly a fortnight before his lordship considered himself sufficiently recovered to resume his journey, and then it was entirely against the advice of his physician, and he was considered rash and imprudent for doing so.

CHAPTER CLXII.

SAM FILCHER AND BEAUFORT ON THEIR LAST LEGS.

PASSING over the particulars of what had occurred to Sam Filcher and Beaufort since we last left them, as possessing no remarkable interest, we will now return to them, and find them in a most wretched and deplorable condition indeed ; their career of guilt, apparently, fast drawing to a close, and, in fact, literally on "their last legs."

The scene was a wood, on a dreary night, with no moon, and not a star to be seen. Everything was as cheerless as could well be imagined.

Seated together on the fallen trunk of an old tree, were Filcher and Beaufort.

Their appearance was about as wretched as the wildest stretch of the imagination could conceive ; their clothes (if such they could be called) hung in tatters about them, exposing their naked flesh ; their toes peeped out from their delapidated boots ; their hair hung disordered and matted together ; their hats were horribly misshapen ; and they did not appear to have been washed or shaved for more than a week.

The facetious Sam Filcher looked as grim as a griffin, and his features were most awfully pinched, evidently from the effects of want ; but as for the wretched Beaufort, it would be impossible to describe his appearance properly, he seemed to be reduced almost to a state of idiocy, and his hollow eyes glared unnaturally upon vacancy.

They neither of them appeared to have strength enough or inclination, to move from the old trunk of the tree on which they were seated, and Sam Filcher was doubled up almost like a bundle, with his head between his knees.

But at length by a desperate sort of effort, he suddenly aroused himself, and raising his head, he gave Beaufort a slap on the shoulder, which made him start as though he had received an electric shock.

"Now then," he said, "wake hup, spooney, an' try to look fresh again. I'm not a goin' to give in this here vay. D'yer hear?"

Beaufort stared at him vacantly, but returned no answer.

"Vot have yer gone cranky," said Sam.

Beaufort still remained silent.

"Damm yer, air yer hobstinat?" said Sam, shaking him roughly ; "vont yer speak, I ax yer?"

Beaufort turned upon him a look in which terror, misery, and despair were mingled, as in a voice which sounded perfectly unnatural, he replied :—

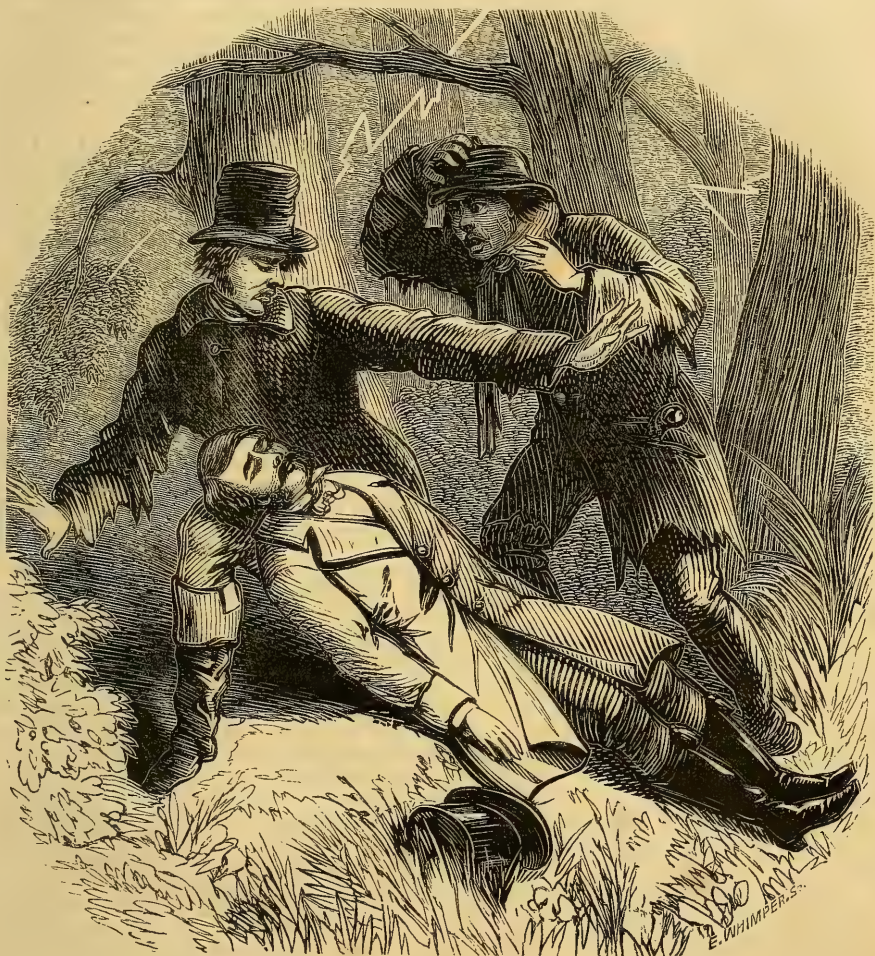
"Leave me alone, Filcher, to starve to die ;—oh I'm wretched."

"Y'ere a fool!" returned Sam, "yer allvus vos, an' yer allvus vill be, till yer turns hup yer toes. V'ere only gemman in difficulties, out of luck, that here's all. But come, I'm tired of this here, an' don't not mean to have not no more of it. Kim along, vot's the use a sittin' here, like two preshus statty's?"

"I can't walk."

"Then run. Yer must do von or t'other, I say ; yer doesn't spose as how I'm a goin' for to carry yer, does yer?"

"My own limbs refuse to do so," replied Beaufort, in a faint voice, and with a most



dismal look; "leave me where I am, Filcher, to my fate, and go whither you please."

"Not a bit of it, thank yer, old feller," answered Sam, trying to force Beaufort on his legs, but failing to do so; "how many more times am I to tell yer that ve must nivir part till ve croaks, an' then ve shall both drop off together."

"Wretch."

"Same to yer, an' many on 'em."

"Oh, Sam," remonstrated Beaufort, "cannot our present awful situation even, reduced as we are to the very last extremity, bring you to your senses?"

"It's not a going for to make a hass of me, like yerself," replied Sam; "vot the devil air yer making sich a fuss about? Ye're not 'alf a cove; this here's nuffin, only a little bit of a change. Von of them here

vot d'yer call it? wissysissytoods of life—that here's the vord, an' bless'd if I hasn't nigh crack'd my jaw in speaking it; I mustn't venture to try the experiment ag'in—which all mortal flesh has to undergo, an' vot's the use of grumbling? To be sure it's rather too hard to have to live upon carrots an' turnips for three days, without bull, ponjelow, or baccy, though I only wishes as how ve could tumble across a good turnip-field jist now; bless'd if ever I'd leave it till I'd had a tight'ner, an' not no mistake. captain."

"What are you handling that pistol about for, Sam?" hastily interrogated Beaufort, with a look of terror, as Filcher took one from his pocket, and examined it carefully.

"Vot for?" repeated Sam, "vhy, to see whether or not it's in vorking order, to be

sure; I means b'sness, for this here's a going on not no how."

"Beware, Sam."

"Bah, I must an' vill have money to night somehow."

"Do you contemplate more murder?" inquired Beaufort, with a shudder.

"Not if I can help it," answered Filcher, carelessly; "but I must have the sugar, I tells yer, an' I mustn't be pertickler, under circumstances, how I gets it."

"Guilty wretch," said Beaufort, "I will no longer share in your crimes. The sight of you appals me; begone, I say, and let me see you no more."

"Walker!" returned the hardened scoundrel, sneeringly, "it's lately come to yer turn to command. Vot the devil d'yer take me for? I've said the vord b'sness, an' yer knows I means it. So let's have not no more patter about it, but come along, afore it gets any later."

"I tell you again," replied the wretched Beaufort, "that I cannot walk, my strength is quite exhausted."

"Gammon! I'll lug yer up, an' then yer must lean on me! nuffin hurts me, I'm hard as flint—strong as a little helifint. Now for it."

Beaufort was again about to expostulate, but Sam Filcher was not to be moved from his determination, and laying hold of him, resolutely "lugged" him up, as he had elegantly called it, till he had got him fairly on his legs, but he was so weak that it was as much as Sam could do to prevent his falling again to the earth, and his looks were as ghastly as those of a corpse, while a groan of mental as well as bodily anguish escaped his breast.

"Come, bear up, captain, my flower," said Sam, soothingly; "yer air preshus keveer, an' no mistake, but I'll use yer tenderly, an' yer'll be better by an' by."

"Oh, Sam," said Beaufort, in a faint voice, "are you destitute of every feeling of pity? You are compelled to admit that I am ill, and yet you persist in forcing me away."

"To be sure," answered Sam, "I does that out of kindness, nuffin more; d'yer think as I could be the hard-hearted monster as to leave yer here all alone? No, I couldn't—not niver, I couldn't; so be plucky, lean on me, an' ve shall soon be able to cut along fust rate."

Beaufort once more looked at him imploringly, but it had no effect on Sam, and he literally dragged, nay, almost carried him away from the spot, with an extraordinary effort of strength which no one could have believed him capable of.

Nothing could possibly exceed the mental and bodily suffering that the unfortunate but guilty Beaufort was enduring, and it did not

seem at all likely, notwithstanding all the assistance he might receive from Sam, that he could proceed much further without resting, in fact, any person to have seen him at that time, from his ghastly, wretched and worn out appearance, might have supposed him dying.

For the last three or four weeks fate had been all against the guilty Beaufort and his desperate companion, until they had become reduced to the awful condition which has been described at the commencement of the chapter.

Food they had not tasted the slightest portion of for nearly three days, if we may except the turnips and carrots of which Sam had spoken, and upon which he had banquetted ravenously, while Beaufort could eat but very sparingly; and there was not the least prospect of their being able to obtain any relief, unless it was from the hands of charity, and that it would be dangerous to seek, for fear they should be detected.

Many had been their hair-breadth escapes during the brief interval mentioned; twice had they been placed in the stocks as rogues and vagabonds, amid the jeers and ridicule of the ignorant surrounding mob, without, fortunately for themselves, being recognised, and on more than one or two occasions they had had to depend upon the rapidity of their flight to save themselves from apprehension.

And yet with all this, Sam Filcher had borne up wonderfully, till he was for a time completely dead beat, and almost in as bad a condition as the unhappy Beaufort, on the evening that we have again introduced them to the reader, but from which Sam Filcher, as has been shown, had again with remarkable determination aroused himself.

The task that was imposed upon him, however, in his present exhausted condition, was by no means an easy one, and, in spite of his exertions, it seemed extremely doubtful whether he should be able to accomplish it. The road, or intricate pathway—if such it could be called—they were pursuing through the dreary forest, was rough and difficult, and the darkness was so intense that it was actually impossible to distinguish objects the shortest distance from you. Added to this, the feebleness of Beaufort increased every instant, while Sam Filcher became less capable of rendering him any assistance.

At length they were both compelled again to stop, and Beaufort sunk exhausted on a mound of earth, while Filcher was glad to take his place by his side.

"It's no use, Filcher," again said Beaufort, in a faint voice, "all this exertion is to no purpose, and can be productive of no favourable result. There is no chance of meeting with any place of shelter or relief in this wild and lonely forest, and I cannot proceed."

"Vell, it has guv me a bellusser, an' no gammon," returned Sam, "an' I don't half like it. It's a bad job, but ve must try to make the best of it. Bustle up, captain, ve're not a going to guv in in this here manner altogether. I only vish as how I'd got a flask of the right sort, sich as ve brought from the smuggler's cave, jist now; that'd rewive us, an' set us all to rights in not no time at all. I say, captain, don't yer remember as how this here's not the fust time that we've been in this here preshus forest?"

"And what of that?" interrogated Beaufort, carelessly.

"Vot of it," repeated Sam Filcher, "vhy a great deal when yer comes to think of it. At no great distance from where ve now air, if yer vill only jog yer memory a little bit, yer must recollect as how there's a old deserted building where ve vonce before obtained shelter, an' it vill do us the same service ag'in, I dare say. Doesn't yer remember it, eh, captain?"

Beaufort did, with some feeling of gratification, recollect it, and he therefore replied in the affirmative.

"All right," remarked Sam, "so yer see that ve're not so bad off as yer thought ve vos. Ve'll jist rest ourselves here a few minits, an then ve'll cut our sticks there as fast as ve can. Ve can't expect to find nuffin to eat there, but ve may sleep off the reckel-leckshun of it, an' that here vill be some consolashun."

The wretched Beaufort shuddered, for he saw no other prospect but that of a frightful death before them; but he said nothing, but the guilty man endeavoured, terrible even as it was, to resign himself to his fate.

Notwithstanding the hunger of Sam had become quite ravenous, and his thirst intolerable he bore it all with the greatest fortitude—nay, it might almost be said, indifference—and even attempted to get up a whistle, but that it is but fair to admit, was a failure, and he relapsed into silence.

In this manner about a quarter of an hour passed away, when Beaufort somewhat recovered himself, indeed, so far, that Sam Filcher proposed that they should immediately make the best of their way to the place he had mentioned, to which his companion assented, and suffered him to assist him in rising, and once more leaning on him for support, they pursued their way, better than altogether might have been expected, although their progress was, of course, slow.

A short time brought them in sight of the building—which appeared to have undergone not the slightest change since they had last seen it—and it was indeed a most welcome sight to Beaufort, and in which feeling Sam Filcher participated."

They were not long in entering the ancient

building, and to which they found no obstruction, save the brushwood and lank weeds, and all was as dark, as silent, and as solemn within as could well be imagined; for there was not the least ray of moonlight to enter in at the different apertures, and a sickly shuddering sensation came over Beaufort, for the fearful idea occurred to him that he was entering his tomb.

But Sam Filcher quickly recollected the room which they had slept in on a former occasion, and which was in a less dilapidated state than the other portions of the old building, and again taking the arm of Beaufort, and helping him over the fallen ruins, they at length arrived at the desired place, where Beaufort sunk exhausted on the broken floor, and Filcher seated himself on the same with as much content and resignation as could be expected.

"Lodging for the night," he observed, "for two single, 'spectable gemmen vot's preshus hard up. It'd have been much better though, if as how board had been included. Howsomdever, beggars mustn't be choosers, an' as ve can have a cumfutable snooze till the morning, vhy, ve must try to make the best of it. I say, captain, my flower, how does yer feel yer preshus mortal remains now, eh?"

Beaufort groaned, which was satisfactory proof that he was not remarkably happy, and Sam Filcher, said—

"Oh, I see; preshus down upon yer luck as usual; don't like the hidear of going to rest without your supper, eh? Vell, it's not very pleasant to be sure; I don't half fancy it, but must put up with it. I wouldn't care if I'd a few turnips only, an' a jug of vater,"

"Silence, Sam," remonstrated Beaufort, in a faint and tremulous voice; "will no situation, however desperate, wretched, and hopeless, stay your foolish and idle levity?"

"Vhy, vot the devil's the use of a man if he can't crack a joke under any circumstances?" returned the incorrigible Filcher; "he might as vell be dead. Vot's the use of blubbering about nuffin, an' a pulling a face as grim as the knocker of Noogate, an' as long as a donkey's tale? That here von't not mend the matter no how. This here's a preshus hard bed though, an' it's of no use a trying to shake up the feathers."

"This is all assumed," said Beaufort, raising himself with some difficulty upon his elbow, and looking at the hardened scoundrel as well as his eyes could penetrate through the darkness; "it is a bitter sham, a mockery; it is impossible that you can be insensible to the dreadful fate which inevitably awaits us, without some speedy and miraculous relief. Be serious, if you can, and think of the awful situation in which we are placed."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sam Filcher, scornfully; "vhy, vot a preshus yarn ye're pitching, captain; wouldn't it make a out an' out sarmint. But it's no use yer spinning it to me, cos yer see, it only goes in at von ear an' out of t'other. I'm not the sort of cove to drop down about trifles, an' yer ought to know that here. Vait pashently, an' see vot vill turn up in the morning."

"I shall be dead before then," observed Beaufort, in a dismal voice.

"Psha," replied Sam, hastily; "how d'yer know that here? Ye're worth fifty dead un's yet; but, s'posing yer vos to kick the bucket, yer wouldn't not be no great loss to s'ciety. Asides, yer can't expect to live for ever, yer must die von of these here odd times yer know; but when yer does, yer'll drop off very suddenly, take my word for it."

Beaufort stared at the brutal villain through the darkness aghast, and the perspiration stood upon his quivering temples in large drops, in the excitement of his feelings, caused by the terrible allusions which Sam Filcher had made.

"Remorseless scoundrel," he gasped forth with difficulty, "you seem to take a fiendish delight in trying to torture me."

"Damned fool as yer air," retorted Sam, "yer tries yer hardest to make yerself mis'rabble an me too, that here is, if I chanced to be made of the same preshus soft stuff. It's not no go, howsomdever, and so yer needn't try it on. But I vants to go to snooze, so I can't be vasting of my walleeble breath in talking to yer. Here goes; good night, captain, an pleasant dreams to yer."

Saying this, the amiable Sam shook his feathers, *alias* rags, calmly stretched his half naked limbs upon the bare boards, and immediately went off to sleep as soundly as if he had been upon a bed of down.

Beaufort tried to follow his example. It was some time, however, before he could do so, but quite worn out, sleep did at last come to his relief.

CHAPTER CLXIII.

EVENTS PROGRESS.

Every day the prosperity of Henry Ashford at his new farm seemed to increase; the health of poor old Mark Mayfield also improved wonderfully, and at times he was almost rational, so that the hopes and spirits of our heroine and her friends greatly revived, and the prospects of all appeared hourly to brighten.

But in the midst of all this, and in spite of her endeavours to prevent it, the letter of Lord Selborne would frequently recur to the memory of Phoebe, and she could not but

feel some degree of pity for him, and anxiety for his fate.

But such thoughts as these she always tried to banish from her mind as soon as possible, and generally succeeded in so doing.

The same subject also occasionally cost Henry Ashford many minutes of painful and perplexing reflection, and without being able at last to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. The vision of the murdered old gipsy sybil, which he imagined, nay, firmly believed he had seen, and the words that it had uttered, also constantly haunted his memory, and filled him with various doubts and conjectures which were difficult to dispose of.

He had been careful to avoid mentioning anything about it, however, to our heroine or his sister, for he knew it would only serve unnecessarily to alarm them, and that was a step which could not be sufficiently admired for its prudence.

There is one individual who held rather a prominent station in the early portion of our story, who has not been lately alluded to, we mean that rather clever and facetious person, Mr. Bob Bristles, the village cobbler, politician, afterwards beadle, in fact, the village factotum: but it will be necessary to re-introduce him presently.

It may be remembered that in a squabble with Beaufort, Sam Filcher, and the villagers, the former left one of the skirts of his ragged coat in the hands of Bristles, the pocket of which contained, what was in the opinion of the beadle, a most valuable document, after he had carefully examined it, and which he secured to himself, positively and obstinately refusing to reveal the nature of it.

This he had continued to do up to the present time, in spite of every inducement—especially from Henry Ashford—held out to him, so that curiosity upon the subject had entirely subsided.

And now to return to the wretched Lord Selborne, whom we left in so delicate and precarious a state, after his secret and precipitate departure from London.

It has been before stated that he had revealed his real title to the physician who had been called in to attend upon him, likewise to the proprietor of the inn, but with strict injunctions not to communicate with his friends only under circumstances of the last necessity.

But there were times when his lordship's illness assumed so serious and alarming a form, that they were almost tempted to break through those injunctions, but a feeling of delicacy and sympathy towards him, caused by the terrible mental as well as bodily suffering he was evidently enduring, and the peculiar earnestness with which the unfortunate nobleman had made the request alluded to, restrained them, and the same unremitting

attention was paid to him, as if himself and the physician had been on the most intimate terms for years.

It need scarcely be stated, that the image of Phoebe constantly occupied his lordship's mind, and to the sincere remorse and repentance which he felt, was added the torture of the decisive reply to his letter, and the certainty that she not only doubted the truth of that which he had therein stated, but the wrongs he had done her she forgave not, and that was more than enough to drive him to the most dark and abject despair.

At times, in fact, he was excited to a state of madness, and in the wild delirium of his ravings, those who were in attendance upon him could form a pretty correct idea of the principal cause and origin of his illness, but of course they did not venture upon the slightest hint upon the delicate and melancholy subject.

But the one sad resolution which he had formed, namely, to obtain a final interview with Phoebe at all hazards, seemed to give him additional strength to combat with his illness, and at length he was so far recovered as to be able not only to leave his chamber, but also to state his determination, in spite of the remonstrances of his physician, to resume his journey on the following day.

This rash resolution might be considered little short of madness, and was fraught with the most imminent danger, but nothing could dissuade his lordship from it, and accordingly the following morning, having hired a post-chaise for the purpose, he resumed his journey, at leisure, towards the place of his destination, resolving to put up at an inn some little distance from it, where he could rest himself for a few days, and give himself time to collect his thoughts, and fortify his mind for the painful and important task he had undertaken, and upon the result of which his fate entirely depended.

But small indeed were the hopes that the unhappy nobleman could venture to encourage, and they almost faded entirely from his breast, the longer he reflected upon all the sad circumstances of his destiny, and the peculiar and bewildering position in which he was at that moment placed, and so torturing were his thoughts as he proceeded on his way, that he was frequently worked up to a pitch of excitement which was almost too much for human endurance.

The mist was frequently dispelled from before his mind's eye; the object of his journey not only appeared hopeless but preposterous, and so thoroughly was he convinced of that, that he was often half induced to abandon it, but some secret and powerful influence seemed to urge him on, and in spite of whatever circumstances might ensue, he could not resist it.

"I must, I will see her," he soliloquised, "and from her own lips hear her pronounce my doom. Life is insupportable, while remaining in this dreadful state of suspense and uncertainty; it has long been valueless to me, and even though I perish at her feet, it would be better far than continue to live to bear her hatred. Oh, Phoebe, much injured being, surely if you could be convinced of the sincerity of my penitence, and knew the dreadful suffering I so long have, and am still enduring, you must pity, even if you could not forgive me. My guilt, I acknowledge, has been great and heinous, but, oh, how terrible has been my punishment."

He sunk back in the chaise, overwhelmed by the violence of his emotions, and covering his face with his hands, for a time completely abandoned himself to all the agony of racking thought.

Other feelings even, than those that have been described, tortured Lord Selborne's mind, and added to his misery. The most strange and dismal forebodings haunted his imagination, and which he in vain tried to conquer, that his end was fast approaching, and that some terrible and unnatural fate awaited him; and such was the powerful hold that this impression obtained of him, that he looked upon it as a matter of certainty, and shuddered with horror at the bare contemplation.

He remembered the warnings he had often had from the mysterious old gipsy sybil, many of which had been fulfilled in so singular a manner, and in his present state of mind, he could not but dwell upon these predictions with much more serious feelings than he would probably otherwise have done.

It was in this state of mind that, after two days further travelling, since he had left the inn where he had been confined by illness that he arrived at the house where he had before put up on more than one or two occasions, and was consequently well known, and which was situated about three miles from the village in which Phoebe Mayfield had formerly resided in happy innocence with her parents, a time which racked his very soul to recal to his memory. Here he resolved to remain as undisturbed as possible for two or three days, before he ventured to put his important and trying plans into execution, and until he might have succeeded in better preparing himself for the painful task.

And now that he had arrived so near to the fair being upon whom his whole thoughts were fixed, and upon whose decision his fate rested, his courage failed him, and he wondered at the presumption, the madness of the idea which had prompted him to form the resolution, especially after the reply which he had received to his letter. That

answer, coming not from Phoebe, but, of course, at her dictation, and speaking her real feelings and determination upon the subject, was of course, final, and showed that she had determined to banish him from her thoughts altogether, or, at least to remember him only with hatred and contempt, and therefore his appearance before her could only bring down upon him her bitterest disgust and reproaches.

He struck his forehead with his clenched fist, as these torturing thoughts occurred to him, and a feeling of utter despair seemed to settle upon his heart.

"Oh, God!" he exclaimed, in the extreme agony of his feelings, as he paced his chamber with hasty and uneven steps, "what a poor, miserable, hapless wretch I am; a curse to myself and everybody who comes in contact with me. Why do I continue to live, when life presents to me no other prospect than that of black and hideous despair. What have I to cling to so tenaciously? Of what avail to me is all my wealth, since it cannot purchase for me one hour's peace of mind? And dare I, after all that has taken place, again thrust myself upon the presence of that unfortunate being whom I have so deeply injured? Dare I meet the just reproaches and resentment of her lover? My courage fails me, despair racks my brain, and my heart sinks within me at the thought. Heaven teach me what to do, how to act, for I know not."

He threw himself on a seat as he thus spoke, and groaned aloud in the insupportable violence of his anguish, and thus he continued for the remainder of the day, and at night when he retired to rest, which he did at an early hour, the same dismal and agonising thoughts pursuing him in his slumbers, conjured up the most frightful dreams to his disordered imagination, which caused him frequently to start in terror, and to leave him in a state of doubt and perplexity whether what he had seen and which had so much disturbed him was real or imaginary.

CHAPTER CLXIV.

WAVERING HOPES AND FEARS.

The following morning, after a long struggle with the tempest of conflicting feelings that agitated his breast, however, Lord Selborne sufficiently recovered himself to reflect more calmly upon all the peculiar circumstances of his fate, and the important designs he had in contemplation; and he even had so far regained his composure as to request an interview with the proprietor of the inn, who was a man of the strictest

integrity and respectability of character; so that in the course of conversation, knowing that he was very well acquainted with Phoebe and her friends, he might be enabled to elicit such information as would be useful to him on the present important occasion, without in any way betraying the nature of the business which had brought him again, and in so secret a manner to that part of the country.

The landlord was a man of superior education, and had moved in one of the highest spheres of life, till unforeseen and unavoidable misfortunes reduced him to his present station, and was therefore fully capable of entering into conversation upon any subject that might be broached, both freely and ably, and the consequence was that his lordship found in him a most agreeable companion, and one who was likely to relieve his mind of many of the painful and distracting thoughts that beset it, and he listened to him with a great deal of melancholy pleasure.

The worthy host was by no means of a prying disposition, but from various observations which Lord Selborne had inadvertently thrown out, he could form a pretty shrewd guess of the cause of his present deplorable state of mind, and although he condemned the errors of which he was certain he had been guilty, he could not withhold from him his sympathy, when he saw him so severely, and so sincerely, as he believed, stung with remorse for the many faults of which he had been guilty.

From him then, his lordship obtained without difficulty all the information he required, respecting our heroine and her lover, and their present circumstances, and that raised thoughts of a varied and conflicting nature in his breast, and made him waver between hope and fear, and likewise to hesitate in what manner he should now act.

"She is happy, evidently happy, in her present circumstances, and her virtuous love for the worthy Henry Ashford," he soliloquised, when he was again alone, "and why should I, guilty as I am, the cruel cause of all her sorrows and misfortunes, seek to break in upon that happiness, and to shock and wound her feelings by my hated presence? Why seek to disturb her tranquility which it must have cost her so much perseverance to obtain? Oh, let me pause, ere I proceed to do that which may cause me even more misery and despair than that I now experience. How vain, how foolish, how headstrong, and how hopeless has been this journey. My brain is bewildered by the various thoughts that crowd upon it, and I know not what to do for the best, and to ameliorate in some degree the torturing anguish of mind under which I now labour."

He could say no more, for the violence of

his emotions choked his utterance, and sinking in a seat he became completely lost in the most dismal meditations.

The next day he was much more composed, and feeling his strength greatly recruited, he determined at all hazards, to take a walk to the neighbourhood of Henry Ashford's new farm, the residence of that fair being who was the constant subject of his thoughts, and all his anxiety, in order that at any rate he might reconnoitre and ruminate near the spot, if indeed no more important results were obtained.

He left the inn, informing the landlord that he was only going for a walk, as the weather was fine and inviting, and should shortly return; and leisurely pursued his way in the direction he wanted to go, deeply wrapped in thought, and taking but little notice of the objects around him.

It has been observed that the weather was fine, but no more need be said when we state that it was the lovely May morning of the festivities at the farm of Henry Ashford, so fully described in a previous chapter.

His lordship's way lay through the most romantic and beautiful woodland scenery, and never could it possibly have appeared more charming than it did on that occasion, glittering as it was beneath the sun's rays, and the grass and foliage of the trees smiling in their brightest emerald.

Various emotions, as might be expected, agitated the breast of his lordship as he proceeded, and at times he paused on his way, and hesitated to advance farther, as painful fears and misgivings would, in spite of himself obtrude upon his mind.

Still the cheerfulness of the weather, and the smiling aspect of everything around, did serve in a great measure to banish his sad thoughts and feelings, and to re-animate his spirits, and after a few reflections he again walked leisurely on, amid the lovely and romantic scenery by which he was surrounded, and without meeting with any individual on the road, which pleased him all the better, as he did not wish to be observed.

But as he approached nearer the place of his destination, his courage again failed him, and he almost repented of the task he had undertaken, and which might be attended with such painful consequences to himself and others. But determining on no account whatever, that this should be more than a preliminary step to the course he had resolved to pursue, he conquered the feelings that had come over him, and with renewed fortitude, and some slight portion of hope, resumed his walk.

He passed through the woodlands, the song-birds carolling sweetly as he went, and seeming to rejoice in the beauty and cheerfulness of the season, and entered upon the

green fields and meadows, where one of the most magnificent of nature's panoramas that the fervid imagination could conceive, opened in full grandeur upon the enchanted and bewildered eye, riveting the very soul in wonder and admiration.

Even Lord Selborne, in the present melancholy and abstracted state of his mind, could not help pausing to gaze at the beauteous and fairy-like scene, with the most enthusiastic and rapturous delight, and for the moment he almost forgot his sorrows in the contemplation.

We have said that he walked leisurely on, but some time had elapsed since he had quitted the inn, and therefore he had accomplished a greater distance than might otherwise have been expected. But he had still some little way to walk before he could reach the place of his destination, and that he did with even slower steps than before, for his spirits again drooped, and his heart almost misgave him.

But ashamed of his weakness, he made an effort against it, and quickening his pace, he was suddenly brought to a standstill with surprise and curiosity, by hearing distant strains of music, followed by shouts of merriment, which fell genially and pleasantly on the ear, on that fine and cheerful May morning.

His lordship was indeed taken by surprise, but the mirthful sounds were little in accordance with his gloomy thoughts and feelings on that occasion, notwithstanding that he could naturally duly appreciate them, and there was a time—long since—when he could enter into all their joyous spirit with avidity and delight.

The sounds continued, seeming to grow louder every moment, though Lord Selborne had offered not to move from the spot on which he stood to listen, and they evidently came from the direction towards which he wished to go.

His lordship was much agitated, though he scarcely knew for why, and he scarcely dared to cast his eyes towards the spot whence the merry strains appeared to issue.

One overwhelming and agonising thought suddenly flashed across his brain, and he trembled so violently as it did so that his limbs could scarce support him.

Could these sounds of mirth originate in the joyous celebration of the nuptials of Phoebe and Henry Ashford?

It was so fearful, yet probable that he started appalled at his own idea, and his whole frame at the same time was terribly convulsed, and he clasped his forehead with his hands in the intense anguish of his feelings.

The longer the wretched nobleman reflected, imagination was almost strengthened into

certainly, and he was about to sink to the earth overpowered by excitement, when he was aroused by hearing the sound of a hasty footstep behind him, and turning round, he beheld a rustic, gaily attired, coming along.

Lord Selborne concealed his emotion in a moment, as well as he could, and when the man came up to him, he said—

"Tell me, my friend, why are those sounds of mirth?"

The rustic stared at him with vulgar amazement, as he replied—

"You be'st a stranger in these parts I reckon, not to know that this be the house warming of Measter Henry Ashford's new farm. Everybody be there, an' I be going too, so I mun stop. If you like to come, I know you'll be heartily welcome."

Thus saying, the simple rustic bowed, and hurried on his way.

What a terrible weight was removed from Lord Selborne's mind. For a moment or two so strong was the impression which the first startling idea had made upon him, that he could scarce believe the truth of what the countryman had stated, and still continued to tremble with emotion; but at length conviction flashed vividly upon him, and clasping his hands together, he exclaimed in a fervent yet agitated voice—

"All merciful powers I thank ye; that which I have so long dreaded and anticipated has not yet taken place, and my mind is relieved of a terrible weight of care and anxiety which had become insupportable."

He paused a moment to reflect, and as the cheerful strains of the music and the glad shouts and laughter of the revellers still vibrated, and more distinctly in his ears, his heart throbbed more violently with a variety of powerful and conflicting emotions.

How happy were all assembled on that joyous occasion in their innocent mirth, and the satisfaction of a clear conscience. Whilst he with rank and title, and all that wealth could command, was one of the most wretched and hopeless of human beings, and all was produced by his own guilty conduct. How thoroughly did he now hate and despise himself.

"What an abandoned, unprincipled villain I have been," he soliloquised, as he still lingered on the spot, not having been able to come to any decision as to what he should do; "and now that it is too late, my eyes are opened, and I see it, and though severely, I am nevertheless justly punished. Oh, that I could make atonement for my manifold offences against high heaven and mankind, and bury the fearful guilty past in oblivion; but, alas, it cannot, will not be, and every hour, nay, every moment, does but serve to add to my utter misery and despair. Phoebe, too, her whom I seek, for whose forgiveness

I crave, she is the gay fair queen of these rustic festivities, and, perhaps with her arm fondly locked in that of her lover, Henry Ashford, is one of the happiest of that merry throng. And shall I dare to mar their pleasures by mine hated presence? Shall I thus throw a blight upon their simple and innocent sports? Dare I venture to appear before her at such a time as this? No, no, I cannot, and therefore let me at once abandon the thought."

He paused and again reflected deeply but mournfully, while his brain was racked and bewildered by various painful ideas, and he still hesitated what to do.

"I dare not venture to reveal myself in my present state of mind," he said at length, somewhat arousing himself, "for I tremble to think what the consequences of my so doing might be. But I cannot deny myself the melancholy pleasure of beholding her secretly, and even witnessing the happy scene so discordant with my feelings. Some secret power seems to urge me on, and I cannot resist the impulse. Let me be firm."

The sounds of mirth and music had now ceased for a time, and as his lordship thus spoke, he moved on towards the spot from whence they had seemed to issue with a firmer step and increased confidence.

But as he approached nearer and nearer, and the cheerful sounds were resumed with increased spirit, his courage again failed him, and a sickly sensation came over him, which might almost be said to amount to absolute fear.

"What utter cowardice is this?" he said, "I am ashamed of myself? What have I got to fear? Surely I can indulge in my melancholy whim unseen? Away with the childish thoughts and fancies which I have suffered to take possession of my brain, and let me proceed."

He walked more boldly on after giving vent to these thoughts, and at length arrived so near the place of his destination, that he could catch a glimpse of the handsome form of Henry Ashford between the trees, and could hear the merry voices of the revellers as they mingled in the sprightly dance, and could almost distinguish the words that they said to each other.

And now indeed his heart palpitated violently, for the moment when he expected his melancholy curiosity would be gratified, seemed to be at hand.

He, however, again paused, for it was necessary that the utmost precaution, on his part should be used to prevent his betraying himself; and he therefore, after he had reflected an instant, proceeded carefully among the trees, until he arrived at a sequestered spot, where he might remain unobserved, or make a hasty retreat should any one approach



and from which he had an excellent view of the green meadow on which the gay sports were taking place.

We need not here describe the scene of hilarity, as we have done so fully in a previous chapter; neither can we undertake adequately to pourtray the feelings of Lord Selborne, when it burst suddenly upon his view. It may be sufficient to say that his senses were bewildered for the moment, and that he hardly remembered where he was.

But his eyes wandered in vain in search of one fond being who was the object of all his thoughts and anxiety, for she was not present at that time, and he felt sad, vexed, and disappointed.

But presently the loud and joyous shouts from the delighted rustics that rent the air, aroused him, and attracted all his attention,

and presently a gay procession of youths and maidens attired in their best, and issuing from the principal entrance to the farm, approaching the meadow, met his gaze and set him on the tip-toe of expectation.

The shouts and acclamations grew louder and louder, and the procession came nearer and nearer, advancing towards some elevated seats, beneath a canopy, fixed in a prominent part of the meadow.

The music struck up its merriest strains, but was completely drowned in the applause of the persons present. Lord Selborne strained his eyes in a state of agitation that may be imagined, and he was not long kept in suspense, for immediately afterwards Phoebe appeared, all smiles and beauty, leaning on the arms of her proud and happy lover, and his handsome sister, curtsying

gracefully to their humble guests, the loved and admired of all beholders, and again the most deafening shouts rent the air, and were continued for several minutes.

Oh, what a sight was this for the wretched Lord Selborne, what feelings of agony and remorse did it rekindle in his breast. His heart beat so violently against his side that it seemed as though it would leap from his breast, and his limbs were so violently agitated that they would scarcely support him.

He was, as it were, entranced, rivetted to the spot, and could not remove his eyes from her, although at the same time he trembled to look at her, and felt as though he contaminated the very air she breathed by his presence.

"Oh, how he envied the pride and happiness of Henry Ashford on that auspicious occasion; how keenly, how torturingly did he feel the shame and degradation.

A whirlwind of wild and maddening thoughts rushed upon his distracted brain, fearful and ghastly objects seemed to flit before his eyes, mocking and deriding him; strange and unnatural noises hissed in his ears; he could endure no more, he covered his face with his hands, uttering groans of mental agony, and with the air of a maniac rushed from the spot.

Fortunate it was for the peace of mind of our heroine that she knew not of the wretched Lord Selborne's presence on that happy May day.

CHAPTER CLXV.

DESPAIR AND PHRENZY

On, on the distracted Lord Selborne rushed from the scene of festivity, totally regardless of the way he went, in the precipitation of his flight, and the wild tempest of his feelings.

A feeling of absolute terror hurried him on, as though he had committed some desperate crime, and was fearful of pursuit, and at the same time the most strange and unnatural thoughts and fancies distracted his imagination.

He stopped not till he was fairly exhausted and could proceed no further till he had rested himself, and then looking timidly round, he found that he had got a considerable distance from the farm, but that he had unconsciously wandered to the forest which was entirely out of the direction he wished to go, on his return to the inn.

His mind, however, was in too agitated a state for him to regard that much, and throwing himself on the earth, beneath the shadow of an ancient oak, he abandoned himself entirely to the agonising thoughts that distracted ed his brain.

Most strange and contradictory were the ideas that rushed upon and distracted his mind; one moment he regretted that he had ventured to the farm, and the next he felt a kind of melancholy satisfaction that he had done so, and that he had once more beheld that fair being whom he had so deeply wronged, and to whom he was so anxious to make all the atonement in his power.

And he had seen her happy; smiling in all that innocence and joyousness of heart, as she did when he first became acquainted with her. Were those smiles sincere, or was that happiness only assumed to suit the occasion, and to please her lover? Had she at last learned to forget the sorrows of the past, and to look forward with hope to the future?

It seemed hardly possible that she could do so, if she ever indulged in melancholy retrospection of the past, remembered the awful and untimely fate of her aged mother, on receiving the terrible intelligence of her darling child's elopement; and how could she be happy while her wretched father remained a raving madman?

Oh, no, it was utterly impossible. Though Phoebe might smile, it was with an aching, bursting heart that she did so, she could never again know what happiness was.

And he, he alone had been the villainous cause of all this, and how dare he, guilty wretch as he was, hope for forgiveness?

In despair he struck his forehead with his clenched fist, and groaned aloud.

How long the wretched nobleman might have remained in this deplorable state, it is impossible to say; but he was suddenly aroused from his gloomy train of thought, by hearing the voices of men, apparently in angry discussion together, not far from the spot on which he was reclining.

He started hastily to his feet, rather alarmed, and listened, for something struck him that the voices were familiar to him.

A word from one of them, which he clearly heard, convinced him that his surmises were correct, and he became more alarmed than before.

The tree, however, concealed him from observation, and cautiously peeping from behind it, his suspicions were confirmed, for it was the villains, Sam Filcher and Beaufort, whom he had overheard, and who were approaching that way.

It is needless to say that the sight of them, especially in his present state of mind, filled Lord Selborne with the utmost dread, for he knew what he might expect from an encounter with them.

They had approached very near to the spot on which he was standing, and there was no time for hesitation. He immediately rushed as quick as he could among a cluster

of trees to the right, where he was safe from being seen by them, and awaited with breathless impatience until they should have got away.

He heard them pass by the tree where he had first been concealed, still in angry dispute; then their voices gradually died away in the distance, much to his lordship's relief, and he ventured to emerge from his place of concealment, and to look forth in the direction they had taken. They were no where to be seen, and, after the lapse of a minute or two to recover himself, and collect his thoughts, Lord Selborne proceeded on his way.

The sight of these two ruffians had served to add to the anguish of his mind, by re-awakening gloomy and torturing thoughts and recollections, especially occurring immediately after the scene he had witnessed; and it was some time ere he could recover himself.

He proceeded but slowly, so that by the time he arrived at the inn the afternoon was far advanced.

The almost ghastly aspect of his countenance, and the general agitation of his manner, could not but strike the observation of the worthy host most forcibly; but of course he did not presume to say anything, and his lordship hastily ordering brandy and water, hurried up stairs to his own apartment, where he flung himself in a chair, and resigned himself completely to gloomy meditation. In fact, so deeply was he wrapped in thought, that he did not hear the landlord enter the room, who placed the brandy and water on the table, and again retired without saying a word.

Almost in a state of unconsciousness, Lord Selborne remained for more than an hour, when he suddenly started to his feet with a wildness of expression which might have alarmed any one who had seen it, and pressing his hands upon his forehead, he traversed the room with hasty and disordered steps, groaning at intervals, and in every way exhibiting the utmost excitement.

"Fool that I was," he exclaimed passionately, "to venture to witness the scene of innocent festivity that I beheld, and which was at such perfect variance with my feelings. And then to dare to gaze upon that beautiful being to whom I have been the cause of such unexampled sorrow and suffering. I must be a hardened guilty wretch, unworthy the name of man. And oh, what a wild tempest of thoughts and feelings has this day's adventure roused within my breast—I feel as if it were too much for my strength of mind to bear, and that I shall go mad, if indeed, I am not mad already. Oh, would that I could tear myself away from those dreadful feelings of agony and despair."

Hastily taking up the tumbler of brandy and water which the landlord had brought him, he drank off the contents nearly at a draught, and then rung the bell in order to have it replenished.

The worthy host noticed the increasing wildness of his looks with deep concern, and hesitated, but the distracted nobleman became impatient, and the landlord was compelled to obey, though he did so with the greatest reluctance.

On his return, he found his lordship with his face buried in his hands, and apparently unconscious to everything but racking thought, and he therefore placed the glass upon the table without saying a word, and again retired from the room.

For some minutes Lord Selborne remained in the same melancholy state as Mr. Henshaw, the landlord, had left him, when he suddenly again started from his seat, and after gazing wildly and bewildered round the room for a moment, he seized hold of the replenished glass, and again quaffed greedily of the contents.

Instantaneously he felt the effects of the intoxicating and maddening draught. His brain appeared to be on fire, the blood to run scalding hot through his veins, his eyes seemed ready to burst from their sockets, his features were painfully distorted, every limb was convulsed, large drops of perspiration stood upon his brow, and trickled down his face, his head turned giddy, and staggering, he sunk heavily and quite insensible on the floor.

The noise of his falling reached the ears of the landlord, and seriously alarmed him, he hastily rang the bell, and having obtained the assistance of two of his men servants, they quickly ascended the stairs that led to his lordship's room, where they were quite shocked on beholding the unfortunate nobleman prostrate on the floor, and foaming at the mouth.

He was immediately removed to a bed, and his physician sent for, who was quickly in attendance, and pronounced him to be in the most imminent danger, so great indeed, that he almost doubted whether he would revive again to consciousness, or could survive many hours.

It was then that the necessity of immediately communicating with his lordship's friends became apparent, and the landlord did so without delay, though it was fearful that the letter would not reach London in time.

The whole of that night, in spite of all the zealous and skilful exertions of the physician, the unfortunate nobleman remained in the same alarming and deplorable condition, and at times he raved wildly, and exhibited all the symptoms of temporary, if

not confirmed madness, and the physician and Mr. Henshaw still felt the most serious apprehensions as to the consequences.

The next day he was somewhat better, but still labouring under the delirium of insanity, from which it appeared that he would not soon if ever recover.

The faithful William arrived as quickly as the most fleet post-horses—with few and brief stoppages on the road—could convey him from London, bringing with him his lordship's own medical adviser, and his solicitor, dreading the urgency of the case.

The poor fellow was greatly hurt on beholding the lamentable, and apparently hopeless state of his revered master; particularly as the latter did not know him, but stared at him vacantly for a minute or two, and then burst into an idiotic laugh.

For three weeks his lordship remained in much the same alarming condition, and the physicians and his friends began to despair entirely of his recovery.

But contrary to all expectations, a favourable change took place, and he was restored to his senses; though it was evident that it would be some time before he could regain sufficient health and strength to leave his room, and be removed to London.

CHAPTER CLXVI.

ONE MORE GLANCE AT SAM FILCHER AND BEAUFORT.

The strange events in our drama of real life, are fast drawing to a close and in a short time the curtain will fall on the final scene, and the *dramatis personæ*.

But ere that time shall arrive, there is much to relate, and more to explain, and we shall now proceed to take another glance at our old acquaintances, Mr. Sam Filcher, and his wretched, conscience-stricken associate, Beaufort.

Some weeks must be supposed to have elapsed since we last left them, apparently on their last legs, and in a most awful state of destitution and want, without any prospect of relief, and it seemed as if their doom was at last sealed, and that it was totally impossible for them to survive much longer, even if they escaped detection.

But they did, by what means it is unnecessary to stop to inquire, although they had remained skulking about Yorkshire all the time, and which seemed to possess a magnet of attraction for them from whose influence they could not escape.

It was on a bright summer evening, that we now find the two worthies rambling about—apparently much at their leisure, at least,

so far as regarded Sam Filcher—two or three miles from the farm of Henry Ashford, but whither bent they did not seem exactly to know themselves.

The spot they were traversing, was a most romantic one, and not far from a rural village.

There certainly was a vast improvement in their personal appearance and the aspect of their countenances, since the last time they were presented to the reader; but still they could not justly be said to be exactly swells of the first water, and they could not with any safety endeavour to pass in a crowd.

Beaufort, however, appeared to have got rid of much of the terror which had formerly constantly beset him, and to have become far less gloomy and despairing. Sam Filcher looked, and no doubt felt, as merry and as happy as could well be imagined.

Suddenly he burst forth in tones not the most melodious, to the following effect—

"As I vos a valkin' von mornin' in spring.

To hear the cows whistle, an' the sheep for to sing,

I met a fair wargin, like Wenus vos she,

So I stepp-ed hup to her vith a 'art full of glee.

Ri-tooral, ri-foddle, ri-doodle dum dee!"

"There, drop that nonsense," said Beaufort, impatiently, though he was scarcely at the same time able to refrain from laughter; "you make yourself ridiculous, and you know it annoys me."

"That here's cos yer no judge of singing," replied Sam; "yer don't 'presihate my woful debilities. That here preshus song, which I only sing on very pertickler occasions, is von of the most beautiful in the Hinglish langidge, or any other, barring none—

"This maid she vos lovely, this maid she vos fair,

Vith eyes like two di'monds, and bright flaxen hair;

Vith cheeks jist like roses, an' korrul lips too,
So, in course, when I seed her she pierc'd my 'art through.

Ri-tooral, ri-foddle, ri-doodle dum dee!"

There's only about eighteen more beautiful an' pathetic worses, but I can't think of 'em jist now. Ah, that here is a song, an' not no mistake."

"What makes you so merry to-day, Sam?" interrogated Beaufort.

"Cos I'm 'appy to be sure," was the natural reply, "an' vot's the use of being down I should like to know, when things is looking up, my pippin?"

"I do not see that our prospects are particularly bright now, Sam," remarked Beaufort.

"Don't yer, then I does. It's ever so

much better than a living 'pon turnips an' mangel worsel, an' not having a blessed fardin' to buy nuffin else."

"True, I can't deny that."

"Then vot the devil d'yer vant to grumble about?"

Beaufort hardly knew what to reply to this, without offending Filcher, so he thought it was wiser to say nothing.

"That here last vin'-fall as ve 'ad has set us on our legs again, an' ve shall have another afore long, I dare say; said Sam, "it shan't be my fault if ve don't. I've jist thought of another werse of that here sweet song, so here goes—

"Now as ve vos a valking among the fresh hay, I ceas'd to be bashful, so thus I did say:—

'I'm young an' good looking, as yer plainly see,

'So vot can yer do better than jist for to marry me?'

Ri-tooral, ri-foodle, ri-doodle dum dee!"

"A stunning, warse that here;—I vish I could think of the 'ole of the ballerd."

Beaufort felt highly gratified to think that he could not; however, he warmly expressed his admiration, for fear that he might ruffle the amiable temper of Sam.

"Ve shall put hup at the village jist 'andy," observed the latter worthy individual, "and see if ve can't manage to henjoy ourselves for a time. I feels preshus tired and thirsty a valking this here scorching hot day."

"Is there no danger to be apprehended in the village?" interrogated Beaufort fearfully.

"In course, ve can venture there," replied Sam, "at any rate I means to do so, an' chance it. It's not wery likely as how I'm a going to valk a blessed step further than I comes to a crib where I can get some lush, an' summat to peek at."

"We had better be cautious, you know, Sam," remarked Beaufort; "you must bear in mind the many narrow escapes we've had."

"An' so I does," answered Filcher, "an' vot's the odds, so long as ve *did* escape!—an' so ve shall ag'in, if ve're put to it, never fear."

"I don't know that."

"But I'm sure of it so that here's enuff. Ve're not likely to see any von there as knows us; and who could suspect two such 'spec-table gemmen as us?—I've got it."

"Got what?"

"Why, another serblune warse of that here blessed song. I shall recollect the 'ole twenty presently."

Beaufort could hardly help shuddering at the idea, but Sam proceeded "to rattle it out," as he called it, in his own original style.

"The sweet vords I speak'd, as yer may suppose, Made her blush from her fore'd to the tip of her toes;

She vhisper'd, oh crikey, that here's not amiss, So I throw'd my arms round her, an' stoled a sweet kiss.

Ri-tooral, ri-foodle, ri-doodle dum dee!"

"Vot a pity it is I can't think of any more of it," observed Sam, with a look of regret, scratching his head to endeavour to recall it to his memory; "for all the best of it's to come; how this here lovely young creetur's infleckshuns vos vinned by his flat'ring tongue—the cruel warmint—how he deceived her—the willian—an' how the poor unfortunate victim of his base trech'ry, von night when they vos a taking a light supper together, snatch'd hup a highster shell boff the table, an' cut her blessed vine pipe, an' died in the coal skuttle, where she'd fell, poor thing. Wery cutting, arn't it?"

Beaufort, of course, agreed that it was, although it was impossible for him to help laughing in his sleeve, and they proceeded on their way, Sam Filcher continuing in the same happy state of feeling, and Beaufort even gaining more confidence by his demeanour.

Stepping over a stile, and crossing a field, the village which was situated in a deep and pleasant valley, surrounded by lofty and fertile hills, suddenly burst upon their sight, much to the delight of Sam Filcher, and not a little to the satisfaction of his usually gloomy and timid companion, for, with its little rustic hostelry, was so retired, that he thought there was no fear of their being able to stop there for awhile in safety.

"There, captain," said Filcher, in a tone of admiration, and pointing to the village, "vot d'yer think of that? That here'll do, von't it, eh?"

"It certainly looks as though it would," replied Beaufort.

"Looks," repeated Sam, "I should say it did, too; why that here's the pleasantest, an' snuggest, an' most comfortable looking wil-lage as never vos. 'An' then only to see vot a slap up little lush crib there is; the best in the 'ole huniwersal huniwar, I'll be bound; so ve'll pay our respects to it with not no delay. Kim along."

Beaufort had no objection to raise, for he was tired of walking and the heat of the weather, and descending to the valley, they stopped at the door of the village ale-house, which, as has been before stated, was one of the most humble and unpretending description imaginable.

CHAPTER CLXVII.

A FEARFUL WARNING.

"Just the ticket, an' no mistake," remarked Sam Filcher, with a look of the most infinite satisfaction, as he surveyed the building, "ve shall be as right as a trevit here, I'll varrant. So ve'll bustle ourselves up a bit, and look fresh, an' in ve goes."

Beaufort by a look expressed his approval, and they were about to enter the house, when the landlord, having probably heard them talking, came to the door, and the amiable Sam Filcher greeted him with one of his most graceful and polite bows.

The landlord—who was a good-humoured, simple man—strangely enough seemed favourably taken by their appearance, and said—

"Now, measters, be'est 'ee in want o' some yale, an' summat to eat wi' it? Cause if 'ee does, this be the vera pleace where 'ee can get it."

"An' ve're the wery young fellers as can do justice to it, an not no gammon," replied Sam; "thank yer, my noble pippin," he added, again bowing politely to the landlord, who smiled, thinking, no doubt, in his innocence and simplicity, that Mr. Filcher was a most affable and agreeable gentleman—some commercial traveller perhaps—and that he was paying him some handsome and flattering compliment, "for yer ciwility. Myself an' my 'spected friend here, Major Drumedary will awail ourselves of yer 'ospitality."

"Ees to be zure," returned Boniface, "walk in, ye honours, if 'ee please, an' I wull do all I can to 'commodate 'ee."

Sam Filcher gave Beaufort a significant wink, aside, which, of course, the latter understood, but the landlord did not observe, and they followed him into a comfortable kitchen, which had a most cleanly and inviting appearance, at the back of the premises, the windows of which looked on to a most pleasant scene; and he was not long in receiving the orders of Sam Filcher, and executing them to his satisfaction, and then retiring from the room, he left the two worthies to the enjoyment of themselves.

This Mr. Sam Filcher seemed determined to do to the most unlimited extent, and Beaufort was by no means backward in following his example. In fact, the ample and goodly fare with which the worthy host had supplied them, was sufficiently tempting, and his two guests having fasted for some time, and walked a considerable distance, felt their appetites pretty keen, and that they were just in the humour to do full justice to it."

"Now," said Sam, addressing himself to

his compassion,, "I s'pose yer satisfied now cap—major, I mean?" he added, correcting himself with a grin; "I tell'd yer ve should find all ve wanted here."

"You'd better speak low," remarked Beaufort, cautiously; "for you recollect the narrow escape we had some months ago, through the curiosity and suspicion of the landlord."

"Ah, he vos a old rat," remarked Filcher, "but this here's a trump, or I'm much mistaken. Asides, vot have ve to care whether he listens to us or not? Ve shan't talk about nuffin as ve mind's him listening to, if he fancies to do so"

"That is all I desire," said Beaufort, "and if we only use that precaution there will be nothing to fear"

"Fear," repeated Sam, "to be sure not. Why, doesn't the landlord take us for two svels? In course he does."

"Yes," coincided Beaufort, "and he proves his perfect ignorance by so doing."

"Vot's that here to do with us?" demanded Sam Filcher, impatiently; "he takes us for a couple of nobs I say again, an' treats us assich; so vot have ve got to grumble about, I sh'ud like to know?"

"You *mistake* me, Sam, I am not grumbling, for on this occasion, I feel perfectly satisfied."

"All right, captain; I likes to hear yer talk so. Vell then, as ye're satisfied, and I'm satisfied, in course that settles the b'sness in the most satisfactory manner altogether, an' ve may as vell make ourselves kevide at home, for ve can't do better than to snooze here to night. Vot d'yer say, captain, eh?"

Beaufort, as has been shown, happened to be in one of his best humours, and therefore agreed to everything that Sam Filcher proposed, and having got a fresh supply of drink from the landlord—who had not had two such capital customers before for many a long day, and he was fearful, if they continued at the same rate they were going that he should not be able to find sufficient in his establishment to supply their wants—they sat down to regale themselves in good earnest.

Sam having ascertained from the worthy host that there was one double bedded room at their service, terms were quickly agreed upon, and all the arrangements for the night were made in the most satisfactory manner.

Notwithstanding it had been such a beautiful day, as we have described, the evening came in gloomy and threatening, and in a short time the storm commenced, and soon rose to a degree of violence, the lightning flashing vividly at intervals, the thunder roaring, and the rain pattering against the windows.

"It's wery likely to be a rough night," observed Sam, blowing a stiff cloud; "so ve

may thank hour preshus stars as ve're so comfortably cribbed; tak'n in an' done for, Who'd ha' thought'd turned out like this here, arter sich a lovely day?"

"True," agreed Beaufort, "and the tempest appears likely to last for some time."

"Vell, ve've not no 'cashun to let that here trouble us, returned Sam; "cos, ve'r snug enuff. Now, captain, never mind the storm. Fire away;—vhy yer don't 'alf drink as I does."

Beaufort certainly did not, for he had had enough, and was getting tired of it; however, he still did his part pretty well, and even drank when he did not require it merely to satisfy Sam."

At length getting tired, they desired, with all the politeness imaginable, that they might be conducted to their chamber, and the landlord having returned an equally polite answer, took up the lamp and desired them to follow him.

It was an old fashioned chamber that the landlord conducted his guests to, and it had rather a gloomy and cheerless appearance on that disagreeable night, but a degree of neatness and cleanliness marked the beds, and all the other articles of furniture it contained which counteracted the sad effect, besides Sam Filcher and Beaufort, tired as they were, were not over particular; in fact, they took but little or no notice of it, and the landlord wishing them good night, left them to themselves.

Beaufort felt particularly fatigued, and half stupefied from the intoxicating effects of the liquor of which he had so freely partaken, and seating him on the side of one of the beds, he proceeded to undress himself.

But Sam Filcher did not seem to be in any such a hurry, and even continued to smoke his pipe as heartily as he had done all the evening.

The storm was at its height, and the thunder and lightning continued with unabated fury, the rain at the same time poured in torrents.

"It's verry pleasant, I allus thinks," remarked Sam Filcher, "to hear the preshus storm rattling 'boutside, when yer doesn't happen to be hexposed to it. That here's the time to know how to henjoy the comforts of a snug shelter, good fire, if it's in the winter, an' grog an' baccy. Vot a pretty pickle ve should have been in, if ve'd been hout in it, captain, eh!"

"Aye," agreed Beaufort, hastily, "but in my simple opinion the best place just now is rest, so, as I am quite knocked up, I shall make no more delay in retiring to it, and I would advise you to follow my example."

"Not till I've smoked my pipe out," returned Filcher, "for vot's the use a going to bed afore yer fancies yer can sleep?"

Beaufort made no reply, but having undressed himself, he got into bed, and what was a very unusual thing for him to do, he almost immediately dropped soundly off to sleep, Sam continuing to smoke in the chimney corner, where he had seated himself.

"Vot a preshus night it is, to be sure," remarked the latter; "and there, he's gone hoff to sleep in a minnit, as sound as a rock. Don't it thunder, nayther; Wheugh!—my preshus eyes—there vos a rattler.—How chilly I feel, an' vot a keveer shuddering sensashun seems to come over me. Vot's it all mean? Bless'd if I couldn't almost fancy as I seed hughly faces staring an' grinning at at me from different parts of the room, There!"

As he thus spoke, Sam rose from his seat and gazed timidly round the chamber, as though he expected to encounter some ghastly object.

"Bah!" he exclaimed, after a brief pause, "vot a fool I'm a getting. As bad as the captain; I must be drunk, an' sartinly I think I have had almost enuff to make me so. I'll tumble into bed, an' try to get a few 'ours pitch, an' see vot that here'll do."

He again looked fearfully and suspiciously round the room, the storm at the same time raging even still more violently than before, and he then appeared more satisfied.

"All right," he said, walking to the room door and locking it; "there's nuffin to see, an' nuffin to be alarmed at; 'twas only the landlord's strong drink, an' my stooped 'ed as is 'alf muddled. A good draw atween the sheets vill set that all right, I'll warrant. So here goes. The captain's sound enuff, howsomdever."

He then proceeded to undress himself, and to retire to the other bed, but in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, he could not entirely get rid of the strange fears and fancies that had taken possession of him, and so strong a hold had they taken of him that he almost dreaded to look around him, and hesitated to seek the bed.

"Vell," he observed, "this is a go, an' to think I can't shake it hoff me. It must be all owing to the lush, though I never felt so afore. I won't guv vay to it, if I does I shall become reg'lar cur."

He endeavoured first to hum a verse of a song, and then to whistle, while he was completing the task of undressing himself; but the attempt was a futile one, and he abandoned it.

He looked once more at Beaufort, whose sleep was still undisturbed, and Sam most heartily envied him the enjoyment of it, and, having left the lamp burning on the table,—for he was afraid to, extinguish it, and to be left in the dark—he stepped into bed, and drawing the bed-clothes over his head, he

tried all that he possibly could to get off to sleep.

But all his efforts were for some time useless, and his uneasiness seemed to increase every moment, though he was totally at a loss to account for it.

Some times he fancied that persons were moving about in the room, and that he heard the indistinct murmuring of their voices, and startled by the impression, he would venture to just peep from beneath the bed-clothes, but could see nothing to justify his suspicions, and he would reproach himself for his weakness in no very measured or refined language.

At length, after many fruitless attempts, and uneasy shiftings and turnings on the bed, Sam Filcher did succeed in sufficiently composing himself so as to drop off to sleep.

The storm had not in the least abated from its commencement, and it was a terrible night for any one to be out.

Beaufort had probably been asleep a couple of hours, and had not even much been disturbed by dreams, which usually troubled his imagination, when he was suddenly awakened by some one shaking him violently by the shoulders, and hastily starting up in the bed, he was surprised to behold Sam Filcher standing by the side, stripped to his shirt, glaring wildly upon him, his face ghastly pale, his face distorted, and his teeth chattering.

Beaufort had never beheld the guilty and hardened scoundrel in such a state of fear and excitement before, and he could not but feel seriously alarmed, although being scarcely awake, he was much confused.

"For mercy's sake, Sam," he demanded, "what is the matter with you?—What has occurred to agitate you thus?—Have you been terrified by some frightful dream?"

Filcher returned no answer, but remained in the same fixed attitude, and the astonishment, alarm, and curiosity of Beaufort increased.

"Have you lost your senses, Filcher?" he once more interrogated, "or are you practising one of your silly jokes upon me?—What's the use of keeping me in this state of suspense? Speak?"

Still he remained silent, although he did endeavour two or three times to return some reply, and he then pointed significantly but timidly towards the bed he had quitted, and a faint groan escaped his lips, and which sounded strangely coming from him.

Beaufort's eyes hastily followed the direction in which the guilty man pointed, but at first he did not perceive anything in the least to account for the extraordinary terror which Sam Filcher evinced; though at the same time he felt a singular sensation steal over him which he could not resist, but was un-

able to account for, and he kept his eyes rivetted on the spot to which his guilty companion still silently pointed, with breathless expectation.

Presently, while he still looked, he heard or his ears deceived him, a low dismal, moaning sound, apparently proceeding from the flooring, near the bed which Sam Filcher had left, and the latter looked more terrified than before; he clutched the arm of Beaufort, and his teeth chattered, and his knees knocked together.

And while Beaufort still looked and listened, a thin vapour, surrounded by a supernatural light, gathered upon the spot, appearing also to arise from the floor, and an exclamation of the most unbounded horror, which was echoed by the wretched Filcher, escaped his lips, when once more the ghastly phantom of the murdered gipsy sybil stood before them, the same as they had before beheld it, on two or three awful occasions; with its hollow eyes fixed fearfully upon them, and its long bony fingers pointing towards them.

Beaufort and his companion stared aghast, and every limb was convulsed with horror, while they could not utter a word. It could be no delusion of the disordered imagination; they were satisfied it was not, and while they still gazed, they heard the hollow, sepulchral voice of the spectre speaking, and plainly distinguished the following words—

"Murderers, your time is now short; the terrible hour of retribution approaches; the crimes you have committed will at last meet with their due reward, the gallows awaits ye. Beware, beware!"

The phantom gradually faded from the sight, as it gave utterance to these solemn and awful words, and Beaufort and Filcher both fell prostrate and insensible on the floor

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

EVENTS DRAWING TO A CRISIS.

The circumstances of our tale again compel us to leave Beaufort and Sam Filcher in the midst of this awful adventure, and to return to subjects of importance.

Time wears apace; an interval of about a month must again be supposed to have elapsed since some of the principal incidents recorded in the two or three previous chapters took place; and even in that brief period several remarkable circumstances and changes have taken place.

Notwithstanding the urgent remonstrances of his friends, Lord Selborne had not yet returned to London, but remained at the inn,

and daily, when the weather or his health permitted, took his solitary walks no one knew whither, and although they felt anxious to know, they did not take the liberty of watching him.

In fact, his lordship felt himself unable to withdraw from the neighbourhood where Phoebe resided, for he could not banish from his mind the wish to have one final interview with her, though at present it was impossible for him to find resolution to do so.

But in the midst of this, the most dismal forebodings haunted and tormented his mind that something of a most alarming and fatal description was about to befall himself, and notwithstanding all his efforts to do so, that impression he could not banish.

A wonderful change had, however, come over poor old Mark Mayfield, in the short period which has been mentioned. He seemed, in fact, as if he had suddenly awakened from a long and painful trance, for he was restored to almost convalescence, and at times he was perfectly rational, so much so indeed, that he conversed calmly and reasonably with his friends, never, however, alluding to the melancholy past, and they taking good care to avoid doing so.

It was even considered unnecessary to continue to retain the services of more than one of his keepers, and he did not find himself called upon to place him under only the very slightest restraint.

The physician who constantly attended him during the time he had found a friendly asylum in the mansion of the benevolent Mr. Stubbles, now gave it as his decided opinion that the principal difficulties were overcome; that the old man's natural strong constitution had been able to battle with his fearful malady bravely, and that there could now be but very little doubt, with proper care and precaution, his health and reason would ere long be re-established.

So much confidence, in fact, was placed in the poor old man's restoration from danger, that he was even permitted to take short walks alone from the house, his keeper, or one of his friends following at a distance to observe him; and at such times he would saunter on to some well known scene of former happiness, which he seemed to recall to his memory more with feelings of pleasure than those of pain.

To attempt to describe the feelings of joy and gratitude of our heroine at this extraordinary and happy change, would be almost a fruitless task; and although it was considered prudent that she should not obtrude herself upon the presence of her aged parent till his reason might have become more firmly established, she looked forward to the time of her restoration to his arms, and his heart's warmest parental affections, with

the most sanguine hopes and expectations, and in which her lover and his sister did not fail to encourage her.

These circumstances did not fail to reach the ears of Lord Selborne, and they excited in his breast mingled feelings of melancholy and pleasure.

For the sake of Phoebe, he could not but entertain the utmost gratification, and he sincerely trusted and prayed that her restoration to happiness would ere long be rendered complete. As for himself, he had nothing to look forward to, he felt all but certain, but the greatest misery and despair. Still he lingered at the inn, and awaited the fate which he foreboded was in store for him, with a kind of desperate courage and resignation.

One thing, however, he was determined upon, unless some untoward fate should thwart his wishes, and that was to see our heroine, her father, and Henry Ashford before his death, so that he might make all the earthly atonement in his power; and in those thoughts and resolutions he endeavoured to find some degree of melancholy consolation.

And thus matters now stood with some of the most prominent characters in our tale, and everything appeared to go on promisingly, when a day "big with fate" arrived, and to which we must at once devote our attention.

The most extraordinary accidents occurred to bring about the events we are about to relate, and which led to such remarkable and unforeseen results.

Henry Ashford and his sister had been away from home on some little family business, since the morning, and singularly enough our heroine had not accompanied them, neither did she pay her customary visit to the hall, but was wandering alone in the neighbourhood even when the shadows of night were beginning to fall around.

Old Mark Mayfield, appearing more than usually calm and rational, had been suffered to take his customary walk, followed at a distance by his keeper; but they had neither of them yet returned, although the evening was far advanced, and began to look dark and threatening, and Mr. Stubbles began to be alarmed, and walked forth from the hall, to try and see something of them, or to ascertain the cause of their protracted absence.

Lord Selborne, too, had been absent from the inn since the morning, and William, fearful, from the wretched state of mind he had been in for the last few days past, that something serious had happened to him, accompanied by his lordship's physician, and two of the men servants at the inn, started in search of him.

CHAPTER CLXIX.

THE FATE OF LORD SELBORNE.

It had been a day of the utmost misery to the unfortunate Lord Selborne, for the dismal forebodings that had so long haunted his imagination tortured him more than ever, and it was all to no use his endeavouring to get rid of the impression, it gained upon him every instant.

The evening came, and as has been before said, it set in dark and threatening; there were one or two flashes of lightning and peals of thunder, and aroused by the symptoms of a coming storm, his lordship started to his feet, and proceeded to retrace his steps to the inn.

It was just at that time that the two villains, Beaufort and Sam Filcher, whom we left in so fearful a situation in the preceding chapter, made their re-appearance on the scene, in a part of the forest which his lordship was then traversing; looking again as ragged and miserable as could well be imagined, Beaufort exhibiting all the cowardly terrors of a guilty conscience which, had never ceased to torture him with tenfold severity since the night of the awful and supernatural adventure at the inn, while Sam seemed endeavouring to make the best he could of it, and to appear perfectly indifferent as to how matters went. But it was not really so, and that which he had seen and heard on the occasion before alluded to, had been almost constantly present to his recollection ever since.

"It's a getting late," he observed, "an' not no signs of b'sness yet. It's enough to tire a feller's pashunce, speshally when he happens to be hard up. Howsomdever, I'm determined, in spite of all, to do some to-night."

"I hope not," replied Beaufort.

"Hope not?" repeated Sam, angrily, "why?"

"Because we have done too much of the sort of business you hint at already," answered Beaufort; "plainly speaking, the measure of our crimes is nearly full—our guilty course has not much farther to run."

"Gammon an' all said Filcher, "I don't care it, at least I don't mean to trouble myself much about it. Money I want, an' money I'll have, too, if it's to be had at all. An' yer'd better mind vot yer about, d'yer hear? Let's have none of yer flinching should a chance be thrown in our way; for I'm not in the humour kevietly to put up vith not no nonsense. Yer hunderstan's me I s'pose?"

Beaufort did indeed understand the hardened miscreant too well, and he shuddered

with apprehension, especially when he saw him examine his pistols carefully.

"All right," observed Filcher, admiringly, "these are the little chaps for hexecushun; an' I only hopes as how they'll be put to the trial, which is not at all unlikely. This here forest has produced us many a bright yaller boy afore now, eh, captain?"

Beaufort returned no answer, for he was too much absorbed in distracting thought.

"Now then," exclaimed Filcher, in angry tones, and slapping him heavily on the shoulder; "rouse yerself yer damned cur, or it'll be the vorse for yer. Vot, air yer a going to drop down altogether?"

"Filcher," gasped forth the now trembling Beaufort, with a look of reproach and horror, "do you still thirst for more human blood? Will nothing ever awake you to a sense of your enormity? Can you so soon forget the awful warning that we both so lately received?"

"Curse the varning," returned the villain, with a frightful frown, and seeming as though he was half inclined to strike Beaufort, "curse the varning as yer calls it, an' yer for mentioning it. I vos a fool to let it make any depreshun on me. I must have been a little bit cranky at the time. As for that here preshus old hag, it vos a good job as how she compelled me to give her her kewihetus, an—"

"Hush, hush!" interrupted the terrified Beaufort, grasping his arm, and looking freafully round, almost expecting his eyes to encounter again the ghastly spectre of the murdered old woman; "for the love of mercy—if you have one spark of such a feeling left within your guilty breast—hold your brutal tongue; see the lightning flashes, and the deafening thunder peals along the blackened sky. There will be a fearful storm presently. Let us hasten from this dreary spot, and seek some place of shelter."

"Not I," replied Sam, obstinately, "vot the devil do I care for the storm? I tell's yer again I means b'sness to-night, an' whether yer likes it or not yer mustn't not move from my side."

How the wretched Beaufort trembled.

"Where's yer pistil?" demanded Sam.

"My—my—my—" stammered out Beaufort, scarcely knowing what to say in order to evade the question, "I—I haven't got it; I left it behind me in mistake at the last place where we stopped."

"Yer know ye're telling me a lie, yer trembling cur," said Sam Filcher, savagely, and fixing upon the wretched Beaufort a penetrating look, which increased his terrible agitation; "no matter, yer must take yer share of voter's happens, there's not no running away from that here, that yer knows, an' yer must take the knosekenses vith me,

if ve're cotch'd, that here's von great consolashun."

"You seem determined to hurry us on to our fate, even terrible as it is sure to be," said Beaufort, in a voice of horror and despair.

"Fate be damned," replied Sam, "I don't care nuffin at all about it, not I. Ve can't not die but vonce, so vot's the odds?"

The hardened scoundrel walked towards an opening among the trees as he thus spoke, and looked anxiously along a kind of avenue, which he was enabled to do by the glare of the lightning, and, as his sharp eye seemed to fall upon some particular object, he motioned hastily to Beaufort, and said, sternly—

"Come here, vill yer? No skulking, d'yer hear?"

The former tremblingly obeyed.

"Ah," observed Sam Filcher, in a tone of dissatisfaction, and handling his pistol in a fidgetty and impatient manner, "it's all dark ag'in now. I'm almost certain as how I seed the tall figger of a svell a standing in this here avenue. There ag'in," he added, as another flash of lightning confirmed his surmises; "it's just as I thought. He looks a rank svell, an' his back's towards us; he's a fust rate mark, an' not no mistake, so here goes, vithout not no furdre ceremony votsomdever."

Hold, Sam, I implore you," ejaculated Beaufort, with a look of horror; but before he could scarcely get the words out, Filcher had discharged the contents of his pistol at the unfortunate stranger, which was immediately followed by a deep groan of agony, and the murderer and his conscience stricken associate involuntarily started back to the spot on which they had previously been standing.

"I've hit him, howsomdever," said the remorseless scoundrel, "now ve've only got to see vot he turns up to he; summat vorth while I hope."

"Monster!" exclaimed Beaufort.

"Hold 'ard," returned Sam, angrily, "or it may be vorser for yer. Hark!—he's not kevitte dead yet, for he's coming this vay. Stand firm, if them here shaking limbs of yourn vill let yer do so."

Beaufort started still farther back, and stared aghast with stupified horror, and the next minute the unfortunate victim staggered to the spot, groaning with agony, and sunk exhausted, if not dead upon the earth.

"It's all u p with him, I'm thinking, poor feller," remarked Filcher, with mock pity; "now then, captain, no skulking there behind, like some great girl; ve ain't half done the b'sness yet. Ve must hexamine him."

Beaufort reluctantly obeyed, and his terror increased to an almost insupportable degree.

Sam Filcher coolly knelt down, and raised the head of his ill-fated victim on his knees, and Beaufort looked on with horror, and ready to drop.

"Vhy, he's not dead yet," said Sam, "I can feel his heart beat. I vonder who an' vot he is."

Another flash of lightning at that moment revealed the features of the dying man, and Sam uttered an exclamation of the most unbounded surprise.

An irresistible impulse, notwithstanding his fears, urged the unhappy Beaufort to stoop down, and look more narrowly into the face of the stranger, but how frightful was his agitation as he did so.

"Horror, horror!" he gasped forth, "it is Lord Selborne."

"The very hidetical nobleman," said the murderer, with the utmost recklessness, 'who'd ha' thought it?"

At the sound of their voices, the unfortunate Lord Selborne for the moment revived, and opening his eyes, fixed them with a ghastly expression upon the countenance of the guilty Beaufort, whom he immediately recognized.

"Oh, Beaufort," he ejaculated, in a faint, solemn, and reproachful voice, "wretched, guilty man, and is it from you that I at last receive my death blow?"

"It was not my hand which fired the fatal shot," replied Beaufort, in a voice half choked by the power of his emotions, "and we knew not that it was you. But if it is in my power to make some atonement, and it will be any consolation to you in your dying moments, I will whisper in your ears a secret which I have long kept locked within my own breast."

"Vot," exclaimed the miscreant Filcher, "yer arn't a going to turn snitch, air yer?"

Beaufort took no heed of what the villain said, but stooping down, he whispered a few words in the ears of the ill-fated nobleman, who exhibited the most extraordinary emotion, as he with difficulty ejaculated in a faint voice.

"Ah, Beaufort, tell me, I implore you, with my dying breath, if what you have just now told me is indeed true?"

"If the oath of a guilty wretch like me, is of any value," replied Beaufort, solemnly, "I swear it."

"Oh, thanks, thanks!" cried his lordship, with a faint and melancholy smile, "reveal this important fact to the world, and I can die happy."

Beaufort by an impressive look promised to obey, and Lord Selborne again sunk back upon the earth, while the former gazed at

him with clasped hands, and feelings of the most intense agony.

CHAPTER CLXX.

THE RESULT.

"Vell," said Filcher, "it's a settled case with him, at last, I think. So ve may as vell see vot he's got about him, and then step it, as kevick as possible."

"Hold, heartless wretch, on your life," gasped forth Beaufort, with a look of horror and disgust.

"Fool," returned Sam, and he at once proceeded to ransack the pockets of the unfortunate nobleman, and securing a well-filled purse and a pocket book.

While the villain was thus occupied, Beaufort unable to move from the spot on which he was standing, the sounds of several voices and footsteps approaching, smote their ears and filled them both with alarm, Filcher starting to his feet, hastily thrusting his booty into his pockets, and gazing fearfully in the direction from whence the sounds issued.

"The report of the pistol has created an alarm," said Beaufort, "another moment's delay, and our apprehension is certain."

"Kevick's the vord, an' sharp's the mo-shun," said Sam Filcher, laying hold of Beaufort's arm, "come along, captain."

They hurried away as fast as they could, and had scarcely succeeded in doing so, when Mr. Bob Bristles—from whom Henry Ashford had learnt the all important secret that day, and had got the proof in his possession—Henry, his sister, Farmer Hodge, and several rustics—one of whom carried a stable lantern—arrived in great haste at the fatal spot.

The storm had passed over, but it was very dark.

"There's no one here," said Bob Bristles, looking round him;—"yet I could swear that the report of the pistol was in this direction."

"And so could I," said Henry.

"Oh, I'm certain that some dreadful, barbarous, and atrocious crime has been committed," observed the beadle; "come Giles, you foolish fellow, what's the use of your having that lantern if you don't show a light? I thought I saw something on the ground."

Giles advanced with the lantern, and holding it towards the earth, the body of the unfortunate nobleman was discovered.

"I thought I was right," said Bristles, "a dreadful murder has been committed."

Life was not yet extinct, Lord Selborne groaned, and was immediately raised in the arms of two of the rustics, while Henry Ashford eagerly stooped down to examine his features.

"Unfortunate man, who can he be?" said Henry. At that moment the light from the lantern fell full upon the countenance of the dying nobleman, and Henry with an exclamation of astonishment and horror, immediately recognized it.

"Gracious powers!" he cried, "it is the unfortunate, but guilty Lord Selborne. Oh, who can have been the perpetrators of this dreadful crime."

"They were here, but a few minutes ago," said his lordship, with difficulty, and in a voice scarcely audible;—"Beaufort, Filcher, they took that direction in their flight,—oh!"

The wretched nobleman could say no more, and again became insensible.

"You and your companions hasten in pursuit of the villains," said Henry, addressing himself to the beadle, "let one of these men remain with me to assist me, and I will see to his lordship."

"Aye, my lads," said Bristles, hurrying away; "we'll secure the villains never fear, and have them hanged, drawn, and quartered. Come along."

"Guilty man," said the noble-hearted Henry, when they were gone; "from you I have experienced every wrong; you have been my greatest enemy; the destroyer of some of my brightest hopes; but now that I see you low and fallen, I will not withhold from you the right hand of sympathy."

As he thus spoke, with the assistance of the man who had been left behind, he supported Lord Selborne away, accompanied by his sister, who was deeply affected.

The villains Filcher and Beaufort were quickly overtaken and secured.

Our heroine had been detained later than she had wished, at the place where she had been visiting, but when the storm unexpectedly passed over, she immediately took her departure for home, alone, and hurried on as fast as she could.

Her way lay through the old church yard, and she had got near her mother's grave when her further progress was for the moment arrested, by hearing the low murmuring sound of a human voice, and casting her eyes half fearfully in that direction, she caught by the dim light, an indistinct view of a form, apparently kneeling at the head of the grave.

Her heart palpitated violently with some painful foreboding, and she approached silently and cautiously the hallowed spot, and could scarcely help giving utterance to an exclamation of astonishment and the utmost emotion, when she discovered that it

was her aged father who with clasped hands, and upraised eyes, was kneeling upon her poor mother's humble grave.

Again the old man spoke, in low, plaintive accents; and Phoebe imagined she heard him mention her name, and in accents of tenderness, as he had been wont to do. She could no longer restrain herself, but with convulsive emotions she rushed forward and sunk in his arms.

For a minute or two the old man gazed at her with a mingled expression of surprise, pity, and reproach, and then trying to tear himself from her embrace, he exclaimed, and every word which he uttered, seemed to go like a dagger to her heart.

Away, base, cruel girl, my senses do no longer wander, an' I do know thee, but will no more own thee for bairn o' mine. Begone, I say again, or kneel here upon thy mother's narrow grave, an' to thy agony o' remorse, I will reply wi' curs—"

"Hold—hold—oh, horror!" frantically interrupted our heroine; "hark! heaven, and my mother's sainted spirit forbids. Pardon, pardon!"

The ancient church suddenly became illuminated as if by magic tones, and the organ peeled forth its solemn tones, accompanied by voices of the most touching and melancholy sweetness, singing the following words:

"Cease to mourn, weep not!

For the sad heart there yet is peace in store;
Murmur not, 'tis sinful to repine;

Cease to mourn, weep not;

The dawn of hope's at hand—weep no more,
Cease to mourn, weep not!"

Awe struck and subdued, with clasped hands, and eyes raised devoutly towards heaven, the father and daughter knelt down together.

Just then the villains Filcher and Beaufort were dragged as prisoners, on one side, and Henry Ashford, his sister, Mr. Stubbles, and followed by several peasants, not forgetting the beadle, bearing the form of the still living Lord Selborne on a litter which they placed carefully on the ground, appeared on the other.

Phoebe observing her lover and his sister, but without at first noticing the latter, rushed anxiously towards them, and Henry embraced her, but suddenly exclaimed, pointing to the dying man, who by a powerful effort had raised himself on his elbow.

"Phoebe, behold here is one who needs your pardon in his dying moments."

"Ah!" she frantically exclaimed, recognizing her betrayer in a moment, "gracious powers! it is the guilty Lord Selborne, and dying!"

"Oh, Phoebe," implored the wretched

nobleman, in a faint voice, "deeply even as I own I have wronged you, turn not away from me with such disgust and horror in my last moments. I seek to make you some atonement. Know then that our midnight marriage was not a mock one, yon man has confessed and sworn to it, and that he only forged a false licence for the purpose of future extortion."

"Oh," said Beaufort, suddenly seized with a fit of malice, "heed not what he says; the tale I told him was false. Where is the proof of what he asserts?"

"Here!" replied Henry, producing the important document so long held in the possession of Mr. Bristles; "found in your own coat pocket, villain; read all of you, and convince yourselves that *Phoebe is the lawful wife of Lord Selborne!*"

"Ah, dear, suffering Phoebe," cried poor old Mark, straining her to his bosom; "oh, thank heaven, then I can again wi'out a blush o' sheame, press thee to my throbbing heart an' call thee daughter!"

Lord Selborne did but live long enough to join the hands of the lovers, and invoke a blessing on their heads, and thus closed this truly affecting and impressive scene.

CONCLUSION.

We have but little more to add, and will do so in as few words as possible.

The late Lord Selborne had bequeathed to our heroine the whole of his personal property, and her and Henry were shortly united, and need we say that they experienced all that happiness to which their numerous virtues entitled them.

The large fortune which the late Lord Selborne had bequeathed to Phoebe, enabled them to live in independence, nay, affluence, but they found no pleasure in ostentatious display, their former life being entirely opposed to it. They took up their residence in a quaint old country mansion which Henry purchased, and their chief delight was in performing acts of philanthropy; in relieving such of the old villagers who needed it, and, in fact, in seeing every one happy around them.

"They did good by stealth,
And blush'd to find it fame."

They were blessed with a numerous family of children, who vied with each other in endeavouring to emulate the virtues of their parents.

The future days of old Mark Mayfield were those of peace and serenity, residing as he did with his daughter and her husband, and having every comfort at his command,

to which the good Mr. Stubbles and his wife contributed greatly.

Amy Ashfield married well and lived happily.

We must not forget William, the faithful servant of Lord Selborne, and whose long services the latter had not forgotten in his will.

The death of a master whom he so sincerely revered, made a lasting impression on his mind, and, although Henry and our heroine in the acknowledgement of the esteem in which they held him, desired that he would in future make their mansion his home, he respectfully declined it, wishing to live in retirement. He, however, purchased a handsome cottage in their immediate neighbourhood, and was a frequent and welcome guest at their table.

Filcher and Beaufort at last paid the full penalty of their crimes. The latter died truly penitent; but the "Sprig of Myrtle," met his awful fate with the same bravado and indifference as he had lived.

The conduct of this guilty man upon the fatal scaffold, was, awful and revolting in the extreme. He came up with a jaunty and reckless air, with a facetious smile upon his countenance, as though he was going to take part in some lively entertainment,—bowed politely to the vast multitude, gave a few flash steps beneath the beam, and then resigned himself to his fate.

The next instant his lifeless body was dangling in the air by the side of his associate in crime.

FINIS.



